







The Fourteenth Key

By

Carolyn Wells ✓

Author of "The Clue," etc.

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To

MY DEAR FRIEND

LILYBEL BARNARD SALISBURY

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THE FOURTEENTH KEY

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CHAPTER I

THE ADVERTISEMENT

"MARK WINSLOW would be glad and happy to receive his grandchild, Joyce Gilray, into his heart and home. Please communicate, Willowvale, N. Y."

But the above notice materialized only after Mark Winslow's twenty-two-year struggle with a determination never to relent, never to forgive, never to seek or accept acquaintance with said grandchild.

Decision of character, that much-lauded trait, is, after all, only one degree removed from obstinacy, and Mark Winslow had taken that degree, and was now one of the World's Ten Greatest Obstinates.

Over forty years ago, in that modern Eden, rather vaguely known as "up Westchester way," he had elected to pitch his tent, or rather, his

wife had elected it, which came to the same thing.

But having seen to it that the pitching was done properly, and that the tent was well equipped with bathrooms and sun parlors, with poplar rows and formal gardens, the good lady passed on.

This left Mark Winslow in possession of his pitched tent and one growing daughter.

The latter continued to grow in all the ways of audacity and coquetry until she grew out of reach of her father's authority, out of all bounds of convention, even decorum, and wound up by eloping with the chauffeur.

Let it be said in passing that he was a chauffeur of sorts, a Harvard undergraduate, working on his vacation.

This calamity, in addition to the death of his wife, had turned Winslow from a fine benevolent husband and father into a soured misanthrope. From an indulgent, easy-going family man, he became a silent, moody recluse, until he could think things out.

He had not a hair-trigger intellect, but he had a sound and fine one, and good judgment as well.

His two great troubles gave him fearful jolts, and he sat down to think out for himself a philosophy and mode of life.

His chosen philosophy turned out to be a blend

of the cynic and stoic, and his mode of life was to stay on in the home he loved and get the most and best out of his solitary condition.

Imprimis, he disinherited and disowned his daughter. He flattered himself he had achieved a wonderful sense of relative values. He sent fifty thousand dollars to the elopers and declared the incident closed.

From that time he had never heard from his daughter but once, and he had not replied.

But all that was about two decades ago.

Winslow was now seventy, and his name stood for all that was solid and honorable in the business world and was equally well known and respected in the marts of art and literature.

Tall and commanding of presence, he did not look within ten years of his real age, and had more the appearance of an English Squire than an American millionaire.

His hair was silver gray, but abundant, and inclined to curl. His big, stalwart frame was at its best in knickerbockers and Norfolk jacket, as he strode about the place, followed by his dogs, or stood in front of his library fire.

He had the air of a man whose oyster was the world, and he had successfully opened it.

Save for the lack of what the novelists call Heart Interest, Winslow was a happy man. The idea of a second wife had never appealed to

him, nor had that of an adopted child. So he lived alone, entertaining guests frequently, chumming a little with his neighbors, and having many interests and hobbies.

At times he would sigh for a home circle of his own, but rarely did he give way to these feelings. When they came too strongly he would set his jaws and go out for a walk.

Mark Winslow's jaws were of a pronounced type and they came together with the forcible accuracy of an Innovation trunk, and were almost as strong.

He was called pig-headed by many, but that was not his real character. If the question were a matter of fact, and he knew the truth about it, he stuck to it. If a matter of opinion, he had his own and stuck to that. No arguments could move him, no threats or cajoleries shake him, once his mind was made up and his jaws set.

Nor could he shake himself. Having decided on a thing, it was decided for all time, so far as he was concerned.

The growth and strengthening of his obstinacy, was, of course, the dire result of his living alone. Nothing is so conducive to a stubbornness of disposition as having no one about to argue with.

And so handsome old Mark Winslow became

an autocrat in his home, and, to a great extent, in his neighborhood and community.

On a Sunday afternoon in June, a day of the James Russell Lowell type, Winslow elected to sit out on his front lawn under a spreading horse chestnut tree.

In common with most of his townspeople he spent Sunday afternoons on his verandahs or under his lawn umbrellas or arbors, and there being no impeding hedges or fences, sidewalk pedestrians often noted and admired the picturesque gentleman adorning the Winslow estate.

His fine big figure took kindly to white flannel or duck and though not to be called a vain man,—he was not petty enough for that,—yet his sense of relative values made it inevitable that he should recognize his own admirable personal effects.

Years of this had given him a certain self-assurance that was not conceit or vanity, yet had a tinge of each.

On this rare day in June, then, he ordained a steamer chair under the horse chestnut, and arranged himself comfortably therein.

From a nearby Sunday School a little girl was on her way home. Impulsively she left her nurse, or whoever had her by the hand, and running across the grass to Winslow's side, she threw herself against his knees, crying, "Pitty man! Oh, pitty man!"

“Bless my soul!” cried the startled Winslow, “who are you, Baby?”

“I’m Dolly,” she replied, smiling engagingly, as she nestled into his protecting arm.

“You’re somebody’s dolly, all right,” he returned, his voice growing tender at the sight and touch of her soft little arms, and smiling baby face. “Wait a minute, Nurse,” he added as a shocked looking young woman came hastily to lead the child away. “Let her chatter.”

For a few minutes the baby told the history of her brief life, that she was four ’ears old, that she lived in Titago, and that she was visiting her Damma, and that she had been to Tunny Tool.

“And what did you learn there?” Winslow asked, a little perfunctorily, for his mind was racing back to a day when his own little girl had nestled in his arms.

“I learned about neminees.”

“Anemones? Flowers?”

“No, not f’owers,—your neminees,—bad peoples. You must ferdiv your neminees. Do you? Pitty man, do you ferdiv your neminees?”

Winslow looked at her. “Do you?” he said, playfully.

“Oh, yes. ’Course I do. Teacher said, Ferdiv as you would be ferdiven. Do you, pitty man, do you?”

"Yes, of course," he replied, his tone implying the interview was over. "Take her away, Nurse, take her home."

He set the child down from his knee, where she had ensconced herself and paid small heed to her gay little gestures of farewell.

For a time he sat motionless. He brushed the words from his thoughts, but they only returned with renewed force.

"Ferdiv your neminees. Ferdiv as you would be ferdiven."

Should he ever forgive? Did he want to forgive? No, a thousand times, no! His daughter had made her bed, and she had been obliged to lie in it. Poor girl, it was a narrow bed now, for he had been informed of her death, through a stranger lawyer.

To the news he had paid no heed—that is, he had sent no acknowledgment. The chauffeur husband had died before that—indeed, he had heard indirectly that his daughter had married a second time. But these things had been ignored in his determination to put her utterly out of his life, out of his memory, out of his heart.

Now, the baby's little broken word, "ferdiv," rang in his ears like a warning. "Ferdiv as you would be ferdiven."

But he had no wish to be forgiven—no reason

to be forgiven, nothing to be forgiven for. He had sent his daughter fifty thousand dollars, a fortune for a young couple,—he had done his duty by her, though she had failed in her duty to him. Pshaw, he was foolish to get stirred up over the thing,—foolish even to think of it.

“Ferdiv—ferdiv—” He wished that silly baby had kept out of his yard! He rose and went in the house for a book. In the library, the word again rang in his heart.

“Ferdiv—ferdiv——”

Manipulating a secret spring, a panel above the mantel flew open, and Winslow took out an old, faded envelope.

Sitting at his desk, he read a letter through once more.

“Dear Father: For you are dear to me, and ever will be. I wish you could see matters differently. Joyce is such a dear, and he is a true man—a fine man, as you would realize if you knew him. And he can support me. We are by no means paupers. The money you sent I have put into an annuity for my child. Oh, father, if you could see your grandchild, I know you would take all three of us back into your heart. Little Joyce is a wonder,—a veritable ray of sunshine, so beautiful and healthy and wholesome and happy. Such a peach of a baby,—just a year old today! But I cannot

write more—sad tears are blinding me—if ever you want us, father, we will come. If you ever find it in your heart to forgive us——”

There was more, but Mark Winslow read no further. He put the letter back in its place, closed the secret panel, and then, hands behind him, began a march up and down the length of the library, that lasted a full hour.

And the burden of his thoughts was “Ferdiv—ferdiv——”

Gradually, as the sixty minutes dragged by, he became more and more of a mind to forgive.

Late for such action,—yes. Too late to make amends to his daughter.

But suppose he should hunt up his grandchild, the little Joyce, who had been such a healthy, happy baby—doubtless like the one who had visited him on the lawn.

How to find young Joyce, he didn't know,—but such things could, of course, be managed somehow.

The child would be twenty-one, now, almost a man. Twenty-one! The idea fascinated Winslow. What a fine coming-of-age present to make to his grandson! Reinstatement! A name and a heritage that some princes would be glad to get. Joyce Gilray. Pity not to carry on the Winslow name,—pity to have the Winslow millions go to the scion of that Gilray

family. Yet it was a good family enough. And, too, perhaps young Joyce would be willing to take the Winslow name. Mark wouldn't insist on this,—every man has a right to his own name,—but if the lad were willing——”

To the telephone the man's steps turned, steady enough now, for his mind was made up.

Burr Winslow was the name he called, and then gave a peremptory summons for Burr Winslow's immediate appearance.

And in perhaps a quarter of an hour, a young man appeared. A fine, big young fellow, with thick, tawny hair and frank, fearless blue eyes.

“What's up, Uncle Mark?” he inquired looking intently at Winslow's face, and sensing disturbance of a serious sort.

“As for you, Burr, perhaps the jig is up,” and Mark Winslow gave his grand-nephew a wry smile. “I'm going to try to find my grandson.”

“Good Lord, Uncle Mark! Just when I'd settled down to the notion of being your heir and successor and—oh, my heavens and earth! But it's all right! And here's my hand on it. Go ahead,—and—I'll help——”

The last words cost an effort,—that could be seen,—and small wonder, for the advent of a grandson would quash forever all hopes and prospects of the grand-nephew.

"I wanted to see how you'd take it, Burr,——"

A light broke over the young man's ingenuous face.

"Oh, it's only a joke! To try me out——"

"No, no, I'm serious,—I'm in earnest. I've come to the conclusion that I owe it to my daughter's child to reinstate him——"

"Hold on, Uncle Mark, why are you so sure that child is a boy? We've talked this over before, you know, and we agreed that it's quite as likely little Joyce is a girl——"

"Not little Joyce now; girl or boy, Joyce Gilray is twenty-one years old. And—somehow, I feel sure he's a boy—a man. I feel sure of it, Burr."

"The wish is father to the thought," said the other, smiling, though the smile was a bit rueful. "However, I suppose you'll take a chance on that. You can reinstate a granddaughter as well as a grandson, of course."

"Yes, though I do hope it's a boy. Stupid of Helen not to tell me!"

"I think it's a girl—you often hear of a girl named Joyce,—rarely a man."

"But it was Joyce Gilray that Helen married——"

"Yes, I know, and the child may be of either sex, and still be named for the father. But I argue that if it had been a boy, Helen would

have told you so. She said nothing of the child's sex because it was a girl."

"Pure surmise, Burr. You and I have talked this over before and we always say these same things. Now, I've made up my mind, and I'm going to find that child,—boy or girl,—if I can possibly do so. I'm sorry for you, my boy, I know the hopes you held,—but—my mind is made up. I'll compensate—as far as I can——"

"Now, Uncle Mark, once for all,—I'm not kicking. I did expect to be your heir, and to succeed you in your business affiliations and in your position here,—but your own grandchild has a far better right to it all, and if you're going to relent and forgive and reinstate and rehabilitate, I'm going to step down and out, without a murmur,—that is, without an audible murmur!"

"You're a good deal of a brick, Burr,—and I'm tempted to give up the project even yet. You're just about all I could desire in the way of a son,—or a grandson, but—hang it all, you're not my grandson, you're my brother's grandson—and it isn't quite the same."

"Of course it isn't, Uncle Mark, I see it all—just as you do. And I can't do more or less—than acquiesce in your decision. You can't expect me to be hilarious over my changed prospects, but you can expect me to take the

news standing,—and I do. I'll be glad to stay in your offices, if you'll keep me, and I'll do anything I can to help you in your search for Joyce Gilray, Second. And there's my hand on it."

Burr Winslow's manner was entirely free from any martyr-like effects, his glance was straightforward and sincere, and there was no trace of servility or favor-currying in his tones.

He looked just what he was,—disappointed, but resigned; sorry, but manfully accepting the blow.

And it was a blow. For years, Mark Winslow had vowed that never should his daughter, her husband or her child darken his doors, and he had tacitly acknowledged his brother's grandson as his heir and successor.

Burr Winslow, now thirty, had grown accustomed to this outlook, and to have it so suddenly changed made him feel as if an earthquake had shaken him.

But his sense of justice made him see straight, and his nature, not unlike Mark's own, made him accept the inevitable with a good grace and without resentment.

Had there been the slightest chance of changing his uncle's mind by argument, he would have used all his powers to do so. But he knew Mark Winslow well enough to be sure that now

he had made up his mind to seek his own descendant, nothing could swerve him from that purpose.

With a final sigh for his lost prospects, young Winslow turned to his uncle with the practical question, "How are you going to set about your search?"

"Don't know," said the older man. He was watching Burr narrowly. He had expected him to take the matter decently, but he had not been prepared for this whole-souled helpful attitude. He did not suspect any hypocrisy or insincerity, he knew Burr's nature too well for that, but he feared that this spirit of cheerful resignation might not last, and that a reaction of resentment and enmity might set in.

"Want advice?" Burr inquired, knowing better than to proffer that commodity unasked.

"Why, yes, if it's practical. You see, I know nothing save that Gilray died, Helen married again, and then she died. Whether the child's stepfather still lives, I've no idea. I don't even know his name. They all lived in California,—that is, they did when Helen died. Now, I've no idea where they are. I sent enough money, rightly invested, to keep them from any actual want."

"Then, as I see it, all you have to go on, is the name of Joyce Gilray and the fact that the

person bearing that name is twenty-one years old."

"That's about the size of it. But money judiciously expended ought to be able to find the—the person. I've been told the Secret Service people can find any one in the country within a few days."

"You're going about it that way, then?"

"How else? If you've any suggestions, Burr, for Heaven's sake make them. I'm not versed in this sort of business, I'll admit."

"What started you on the search, Uncle Mark?"

Mark Winslow gave a full and detailed account of the little child who had roused his conscience to activity with her prattle about "ferdivness."

"Whew!" whistled the young man. "'And a little child shall lead them.' Well, Uncle, it's right,—that's what it is, *right*. And I'll do all I can to help, but you'll excuse me if I remark in passing, that I hope your Joyce Gilray turns out to be a girl, and that she will have a predilection for tall young men with blond curls. Then I could marry her, and so stay in the family, you see."

Mark Winslow's eyes twinkled. "That's all well enough if she *is* a girl. But I have an impression that I heard the child was a boy. Perhaps from the lawyer's letter, telling me of Helen's death."

"Haven't you that letter?"

"No, I tore it up the moment I read it. I felt that with Helen's death the whole chapter was closed, and I destroyed the letter. But I have a dim recollection of a reference to my grandson, Joyce Gilray."

"Well, in that case, I'm entirely out of the running. All right, Uncle Mark,—let's get to work. Yes, since you ask it, I have a suggestion to make. I think the best way would be to advertise in one of those magazines that make a point of finding missing persons."

"Didn't know there were such."

"You wouldn't. They're not the sort of periodicals you read. Oh, they're all right, but they're mostly adventure stories or mystery yarns; and in the back there are a few pages devoted to this matter of bringing separated friends or relatives together again."

"Sounds hopeful, I should think. Have you any of these papers?"

"At home, yes. I'll bring some over to show you. Anyhow, I can't think of any other way to go about this matter,—that is, except through the police. And the advertisement seems less—well, public, don't you think?"

"Yes, I do. And while I don't fear publicity, yet if we can keep the matter quiet until I get Joyce here, it would of course be better."

“If you had that lawyer’s address, or any address for Helen’s family, you could write direct,—but you haven’t, have you?”

“No. I only know they went West, and, so far as I know, stayed there.”

“Shall you take on Joyce’s stepfather, too?”

“No!” said Winslow, angrily. “I had no use for Helen’s first husband, and I’ve still less for her second. What a pity my daughter, my only child, proved such a disappointment to me.”

“Of course, you also proved a disappointment to her.”

“Yes; I’ve no doubt she felt sure that I would forgive her at once, and take her and her silly husband back to my fold.”

“And you wish now that you had——”

“Oh, I don’t know! Let up on that sort of talk, Burr. The past is past. Now, suddenly, I’ve concluded to hunt up my grandchild. Begin from that, and don’t hark back.”

“All right, Uncle Mark. Let’s draft the advertisement. If I’m to abdicate, I may as well begin to smoke out my successor.”

“You take it cheerfully, Burr. Are you feigning this attitude?”

“You bet I am, Uncle Mark! Deep down in my heart I am as mad as I can be! But what’s the use? I never lose my temper unless some-

thing can be gained thereby. And as I see this thing, your mind is made up. I haven't lived and worked for you these many years, not to know what it means when you make up your mind. And so, though I'm blue as blazes over the whole matter, I'm resigned, because—well, you remember the story of the Scotchman. They asked him if he was resigned to the death of his wife. And he replied, "Good Lord, I've got to be!" That's my platform. I've got to be resigned to this thing,—and with what I suppose may be called my better nature, I do see the justice of it,—and so I shall be master of my soul, if I can't be captain of my fate."

"You're a fine fellow, Burr,——"

"Cut that, Uncle," the young man flushed. "I'm not playing to the grandstand, or acting the part of a Sunday-school-book hero! It's only that I know when I'm beaten, and I hope I'm a good loser."

"Your mother won't see it as you do," and Mark Winslow gave a wry smile.

"You bet she won't," agreed Burr. "But that's neither here nor there. She will probably come over here and give you a—well a wordy quarter of an hour, but I'll do all I can to prevent that. Now, about this advertisement. What shall we say?"

And after several attempts to embody their

message in a few words, they hit upon the form given at the beginning of this chapter, and sent it off to all the magazines that printed such appeals.

CHAPTER II

MOLLY WINSLOW

“DRAT the brat!”

In justice to Mrs. James Winslow it must be said that she rarely dropped into the coarser language that had been her habitual usage before she married into her husband's aristocratic family.

James Winslow, son of Mark's brother Matthew, had been caught by the bright eyes and rosy cheeks of a factory girl, whose antecedents, though honest people, lacked the graces and refinements of the better families.

James had married her, and had tried to improve her ways and speech. Had succeeded too, in the main; but in moments of stress, Mrs. James, now a widow, still fell back to the diction of her youth.

Her vigorous denunciation in this instance was occasioned by the story her son Burr told her of the astonishing conversion of Mark Winslow regarding his daughter's child.

The actual speech, however, referred to the little girl, whose Sunday-school teachings had been transferred to the millionaire magnate of Willowvale.

As Mark Winslow had made no secret of the fact that the child's observations on forgiveness had been the lever that moved his heart, so Burr related the incident to his mother.

Mrs. James Winslow was ambitious for her son, and had settled comfortably down in the knowledge and belief that he was to be the heir of his great-uncle, Mark. Now, that this prospect was ruthlessly torn away, she collapsed, mentally, morally and physically.

"And you're going to submit tamely," she fairly shrieked at her son, who, disturbed and apprehensive, stood before her.

"What else can I do, mother? You know what Uncle Mark is, once he makes up his mind."

Molly Winslow shook her head. She was still comely, her black hair and snapping black eyes having well withstood the onslaughts of time. Men had wanted to marry her, but her heart had been given to James Winslow, and now her only interest in life was her cherished son, Burr.

Yet they were not entirely congenial. Burr's fine notions of honor and chivalry she often derided with all the strength of her common

little soul. His tastes were far plainer than hers, and the trinkets and gewgaws with which she saw fit to adorn their home grated on his sensibilities.

But he was a dutiful, loyal son, and accepted his mother as he did other conditions of life, loving such of her traits as he could, liking such as he might, and ignoring those that irritated and annoyed him.

But coarse or vulgar speeches he never forgave.

"Mother!" he cried, frowning with distaste at the phrase she had used.

"Well, I don't care! To think of that silly kid coming along, and with a few baby words upsetting your whole life and career! It's too terrible!"

"I think Uncle Mark would have come around to this same decision anyway. He's been restless of late, and I think as he gets older, he wants to make up with Helen's child and have peace before he dies."

"Dies! Mark Winslow is no more likely to die than you are! I know he's seventy, or nearly, but he's as hale and hearty as a man of sixty. Never an ache or a pain, no rheumatism or indigestion,—oh, I know Mark Winslow! No danger of his dying for many a long year yet."

"I think he's been thinking over these matters, though. But, any way, that doesn't matter.

He's sent his advertisement,—now if there's a response, that cooks my goose."

"And I say you're a poor slump of a man, to make no effort to save the situation, to make no protest at being done out of your rights, to lie down and let Mark Winslow walk over you!"

"When Mark Winslow starts to walk over anybody, he walks. One may as well lie down to it, for no other attitude would help a mite."

The two sat in the pleasant little living room of their home, a few blocks away from the big Winslow house. A pretty little home it was, too, or would have been if Mrs. Winslow had not insisted on certain furnishings of crimson plush and decorations of tawdry bric-à-brac that accorded ill with the dignified desk, secretary and chairs of old mahogany which had been Burr's contributions to their household gods.

But like his Uncle Mark, he too had a sense of relative values, and, as he looked at it, his mother's wishes should come before his own preferences.

"For," he said to himself, "this home is all she has; while I am much of the time at Uncle Mark's or in the office, and I'm also often in New York, so that I have varied scenes, while mother has only the one place."

Out of doors, Burr was, too, a great deal of his free time. Golf and tennis claimed him,

the Country Club hailed him as a favorite member, and many of the big country houses welcomed the good looking young giant to their hospitable festivities.

So, on the whole, mother and son saw little of each other, but a cordial friendliness marked their relationship.

Burr had inherited his father's nature, and this made him acceptable to his Uncle Mark, who declared that he was all Winslow. Mark frankly and cordially detested Burr's mother, and never saw her if he could avoid it.

As both men had anticipated, Mrs. James Winslow lost no time in calling upon Mark, and telling him exactly what she thought of his line of conduct.

He would have refused to see her, but he thought best to get the interview over once for all.

"What does this mean?" the lady began, blusteringly.

"What does what mean?" was the quiet response, though Mark Winslow's eyes were stormy.

"Doing my son out of his rightful place, and hunting about for some strange upstart to supplant him!"

"You call my grandson a strange upstart?"

"Grandson, indeed! You've no reason to

think your daughter's child was a boy. For all you know it may have been a girl."

"Very well, then I shall have a granddaughter to comfort my declining years."

"Comfort! A likely story! Why, that girl, if it is a girl, will be a wild Westerner, probably given to riding mustangs or breaking bronchos, or whatever those hoydens do!"

"Maybe that will be better than the fast-paced, be-rouged flappers I hear so much of in this end of our country. But it is my impression that I heard from my daughter's lawyer that my grandchild is a boy,—by this time a young man of twenty-one. Surely, Molly, you can't expect me to prefer my brother's grandson to my own."

"Well, why didn't you get around to it sooner, then, before my boy came to look upon all this as his future possession—" she broke off with a sob, as she looked around the beautiful home, and out upon the spacious estate.

"I'm sorry, Molly," said Mark, more gently; "especially sorry for you. Burr takes it like a man,——"

"Oh, Burr! Weak, spineless numskull that he is! He adores you—if you told him to cut off his hand, he'd do it! And what reward does such devotion bring him? Dismissal from all he hoped for, all he looked forward to! Mark Winslow, you are a monster,—a cheat——"

“There, there, now, Molly, if you go on like that, I shall have you put out of my house. I have a right to do what I will with my own. Burr shall not suffer greatly, in a moneyed way. I shall remember him handsomely in my will, and when he marries, I shall give him a house and land——”

“Oh, don’t tell me those things! A mere pittance compared to what you have led him to expect! I tell you, you had no right to raise his hopes to the utmost, and then dash them utterly!”

“Has Burr said this sort of thing to you?”

“W—well, not exactly, but, as I say, you have the boy so under your thumb, that he wouldn’t turn against you though you flayed him alive!”

“Oh, come, now, Burr and I are good friends but there’s nothing servile in his attitude toward me. He’d be the first to deny that.”

“Then, if he’s such a fine fellow, and such a good friend of yours why are you throwing him over?”

“For my own direct issue, my daughter’s child. Now, let that answer suffice, and desist from any further questions. I do not forget that you are the wife of my brother’s son, but I may forget it if you remain longer, or harp on this subject further. I wish you good morning.”

“Very well, I’ll go,” and his visitor rose. “But mark my words, you’ll rue the day when you get your new heir into your house. And I hope you will! I hope your grandchild will have all the worst traits of his chauffeur father. That he will be mean-natured and bad dispositioned. That he will look like a common person and act like a boor! I hope you live to regret your foolish act of disowning my son, my fine-natured, well brought up son, for your renegade daughter’s child!”

By this time the woman’s voice had risen to a shrill scream, all the more angered because Mark Winslow preserved his calm demeanor, and courteous smile as he gazed at her perturbed face.

She went away, and Winslow watched her agitated course down the garden path. Then he turned away from the window, saying, “I wonder—I wonder.”

But Mark Winslow was not one of the World’s Ten Greatest Obstinates for nothing. He was no whit swerved from his course by the tirade of Molly Winslow, and he resolved to make it up to Burr financially, though he cut him off in other ways.

The Winslow business interests were widespread and important, and though retired from active participation, Mark Winslow still retained

a controlling vote and was the real as well as the nominal head.

This responsibility would eventually devolve upon the man of Winslow's choice, and Burr had had every reason to believe that he would be the favored one. Now, if a grandson materialized, naturally, Burr Winslow would take a back seat.

And Mark Winslow's absolute disregard of his own family connections for so many years had made it the settled conviction of everybody that Burr Winslow would be his sole heir and successor.

But there is such a thing as an anger so fiery that it at last burns itself out, and this was Mark Winslow's experience. Long nursing of wrath against his wilful daughter and her negligible husband had dulled itself, as an unmended fire burns away to embers and then to ashes.

Advancing years had brought a less acute indignation, a more lenient judgment, and, finally an absence of rancor. Then, by chance, the speech of a prattling baby had wakened the spirit of forgiveness and brought about a revival of affection which urged Winslow to an effort to make reparation for his long years of stern punishment.

He regretted Burr's disappointment, but his

obstinacy was now set in another direction, and he allowed nothing to stand in his way.

He was deeply gratified at the way Burr took it. Not with a meek, martyr-like spirit, but like a man, meeting his sudden downfall with a brave front,—almost with a grin of courage.

Well, time would tell. Perhaps Burr would be the heir after all. Perhaps no replies would ever come to the advertisements; perhaps the grandchild would turn out to be a girl; perhaps, if a man, he would be a worthless scamp, incapable of managing business matters.

June passed by, and the greater part of July followed, and then, one morning appeared in the mail a letter post marked San Francisco.

“Mr. Mark Winslow:” it began:

“DEAR SIR:

“I have just run across an advertisement in the *Buccaneer Magazine*, which I am sure is meant for me. I have not been accustomed to look upon you with any feelings of love or respect. My mother died when I was fourteen, and since that time I have shifted for myself, but I have been able to do so successfully. Yet I do feel a desire for a relative,—for a home,—for a family connection of some sort. And I am favorably impressed with the wording of your message, and the welcoming spirit it hints. Will you

write me, and then I can tell better whether I want to go to you or not. Address me at the General Post Office, San Francisco.

“Sincerely yours,
“JOYCE GILRAY.”

Mark Winslow read this letter through three times, and then without a word passed it over to Burr, who, as usual was with him in the office, taking care of the morning's mail. The office was a perfectly equipped room in the Winslow home. Here such details of the business as needed Mark's attention were put through, each day, and then Burr would go off to the Company's offices in New York.

The younger man also read the missive two or three times, and then, with a whimsical smile looked up at his uncle, and said, “Girl or boy?”

“Oh, a man,” said Mark, positively. “Why, it's typewritten and beside, it sounds like a man's construction. A girl would never take that semi-hostile attitude. Also, the signature is distinctly a man's writing.”

“That's so,” agreed Burr, as he scrutinized the autograph, whose bold, free strokes and careless dash showed unmistakably a masculine pen.

“I feel the tone of the letter is a trifle insolent,” Mark said, ruminatively, “yet I can't altogether

blame the boy for that. He must resent my attitude, the only one he has ever known. He hasn't even his mother's recollection of the days when I was a kind and indulgent parent. All he knows is that I am a monster and an ogre. He can't turn around all at once and be prepared to love me. On the whole, I like his hesitation and his uncertainty as to whether he wants to put up with me or not."

"You're sure he's the right one? I mean, there's no chance for imposture?"

"Chance enough, but nobody could put it over. If this Joyce Gilray comes here he'll have to prove his identity to my entire satisfaction. But if he's my grandson, I'll know it. Some subtle sense will tell me. And, too, he'll have recollections of his mother, which can quickly prove his case. He had her till he was fourteen, so he can answer all my questions about her. I'm getting quite excited over it, Burr. Helen's child! Wonder if he looks like Helen. Maybe like his father. Gilray was a handsome chap,—good fellow, too. But not what I aspired to for my daughter. Well, I'll write to him at once. General Post Office, hey? Too canny to give a more definite address. If my letter doesn't measure up to his requirements, I dare say he won't come here at all!"

"The stationery is that of a big San Francisco

Hotel," Burr observed, scrutinizing the sheet and envelope.

"Yes, that betrays no secrets, you see." Mark Winslow chuckled, as if delighted at the canny cleverness of his new-found relative. "He's determined not to put all his cards on the table, until he sees mine."

"Well, when he sees yours, he'll play the game, of that I'm certain," and Burr permitted himself a grim smile as he saw his own fortunes wrecked.

"Yes, I think he will," said Mark, quietly, and turned to his desk.

Half an hour later, he had concocted a long and explicit document, that set forth his new attitude of affection for his grandchild, and his change of heart concerning the situation. He expressed his desire that Joyce should come East immediately, and become a resident of the Willowvale home, and promised all the love, and loyalty that a grandparent could give, including a promise to make said Joyce sole heir to the Winslow estate and fortune.

After signing this screed, on a sudden impulse, Mark added a postscript, saying,

"I'm not quite sure whether you are a man or a girl. Please telegraph this most important information at once."

Burr smiled at the postscript, when his uncle passed over the letter for him to read.

"Small doubt, when you look at the signature," he commented, glancing again at the dashing autograph. Still, you never can tell. Western girls are different from ours."

"But no girl ever wrote that," and Mark nodded at the name on the letter. "Well, post it in New York, Burr, and if you hate to lose your own position here, you can destroy it, you know."

"I'll strive to resist that temptation," said Burr, but he did not smile as he thrust the letter in his pocket and prepared to depart.

Left to himself, Mark Winslow had a momentary qualm as to the wisdom of his actions. Had he done well to supplant Burr by an unknown quantity? He didn't like Burr's grim face as he took that letter. Yet he well knew that Burr would do nothing wrong. He was a faithful, devoted worker in the Winslow offices, and though now he was about to be supplanted, yet he would receive many and substantial benefits as time went on.

Obstinacy conquered, and with a quick gesture Mark Winslow picked up his telephone and summoned Martin Barry, his lawyer.

At the news his client told him, Lawyer Barry was dumfounded. The idea of restoring the absent grandchild to favor was right enough, but to go ahead so fast as to make a new will

and leave said grandchild all his fortune was, to Barry's mind, rash and ill-advised.

But it was about as futile as talking to the wind to try to change Mark Winslow's mind.

A few telling arguments from Barry were brushed aside by Mark as of no consequence whatever. All objections were met with the insistence that a man had the right to do as he chose with his own and by his own. And finally, after a hint that if Barry didn't care to continue his post as adviser and lawyer there were others to be employed in those capacities, the legal gentleman gave up the strife, and drew the will in exact accordance with his client's wishes.

There were minor bequests, many of them; there was a substantial sum left to Mrs. Molly Winslow. A larger sum still was apportioned to Burr, with a goodly share of stock in the Winslow Company. And then, the residuary legatee was, "my grandchild, Joyce Gilray, child of my daughter Helen, and her husband, Joyce Gilray."

This was clear and definite enough, and covered the possibility that, after all, the grandchild might be a girl.

But Barry agreed that the signature to the letter undoubtedly meant that Joyce Gilray was a man, and a strong and forceful character at that.

"I'm not a chirographical expert," the lawyer said, "but I've seen enough handwriting to set that specimen down as the autograph of a real man, possessed of self-respect and self-assurance."

But no telegram came, when the time was ripe, telling of the sex of Joyce Gilray. Mark began to fear that his overtures were not to be accepted. And then, in due time, came another letter.

This was on plain paper, large, good quality and correct style.

The date was merely San Francisco, without street number. This one began:

"DEAR GRANDFATHER:

"What a lark! To think you don't know whether your daughter's baby was a boy or a girl! Well, I'll keep you guessing, for the mystery is quite in keeping with some of the stories in the magazine where I found your advertisement. And in a week or so, I'll show up in my true colors on your doorstep, and then you'll know. I like your letter first rate, and I'm accepting your invitation and shall hold you to all your promises. I'll come across by the Santa Fé, and will probably lift Willowvale about the middle of August. Will wire exact date, later. I have to settle up a few business matters here, as I hope I shall never return. Wonderful climate and all that, but I long for

the excitements and activities of New York, which El Dorado I never have seen.

“You may imagine me as a big, husky chap, or a sweet young girl with ringlets and dimples! But at any rate, I am

“Your affectionate Grandchild,

“JOYCE GILRAY.”

This time the signature was penned in print letters, rather scrawly, as if the writer were humorously disguising any sex indication.

“The boy’s full of fun,” said Mark, with a nod of satisfaction. “That’s like his mother, at any rate.”

“Boy?” said Burr, with a quizzical smile.

“Yes, of course. Shows in every line of the letter. Sorry for you, Burr. But buck up, you and he may be great chums——”

“Hold on, Uncle Mark,—there’s a limit! I accept my dethronement but I make no promises to be chums with the new monarch.”

And a gleam of independence shot from the eyes of the younger man straight into those of his uncle.

CHAPTER III

PINNEY'S DEPARTURE

IN the lobby of a big San Francisco hotel a young man was going through the process known as checking out.

The marble-faced room clerk became almost urbane as he took the key from his departing guest.

"Going East, Mr. Pinney?" he inquired, pleasantly.

"New York City, and environs," was the smiling response.

"Good luck to you, and hope to see you back here soon."

"Not if all goes well. I've served my term in Hollywood, and I'm going to turn over a new leaf."

Several curious faces were turned toward the young man as he gave a porter some instructions and watched his various pieces of luggage duly attended to.

Crossing to the news stand, he picked up the

new *Buccaneer Magazine*, dropped some change, and went out to his waiting taxicab.

Later, in the train, having finished a long and thrilling murder yarn in his favorite periodical, he sat up and took notice of his fellow travelers.

None interested him specially, he saw no one he knew, and noticed nobody he cared to know. Returning to his reading, he spent the rest of the day in the smoking car or diner, and tumbled into his berth early.

But the next day, invigorated by a long night's sleep, and ready for adventure, he sought the observation car, and looked hopefully at the other passengers.

One young woman he thought charming, but as she was obviously guarded by a lynx-eyed husband, he gave up all hope of a chat with her.

There were, however, three girls whose bright, piquant faces seemed to promise pleasant acquaintance.

They were not traveling together, and selecting the least timid looking of the three, he proceeded with discretion and tact to draw her into a conversation.

It wasn't difficult, for his frank, handsome face, and gentle manner attracted her at once, and the *camaraderie* of the train allowed, she thought, a certain latitude of convention.

He learned that her name was Susie Ray,

that she was going to visit an aunt in New England, and later go to school there. She was a bright, yellow-haired little thing, of great volubility, and given to giggles.

"And I know who you are!" she cried, gaily, "you're Tom Pinney, the movie star!"

"Tom Pinney, at your service," he said, "but not accorded the title of star."

"Oh, yes, you are! Why, we never miss a picture that has your name in the cast. That one-sided smile of yours is as well known as Charlie Chaplin's feet or Mary Pickford's curls."

"Now you're flattering me, and if you do that I shall go away and flirt with some other girl," and the queer little one-sided smile flashed at her.

"Which one?" she parried, looking about the car.

"The pretty one with the blue hat, or else the serious faced one in brown." His glances followed her own.

"They're not half as nice as I am," she assured him comfortably, and pinned him to her side the rest of the morning.

But Pinney's was a butterfly nature and after luncheon he sought out the other two girls.

They had become acquainted by this time, and in his easy-going way, he joined the pair, and in a short time they were chatting like old friends.

The pretty one, as he had called her, had a round, babyish face and bobbed hair, while the other, older and a trifle shyer, had dark hair and eyes, a straight nose and a wistful, drooping mouth.

Impartially, Pinney chatted with both, making good as he always did when he wanted to. His magnetism was irresistible, his casual, off-hand way was attractive, and the dark haired girl's mother across the aisle, merely smiled as she saw her daughter animatedly talking to the good looking stranger.

It was not long before names were exchanged, the dark haired girl being Jane Phelps and the bobbed one, Lora Ward.

Pinney modestly admitted being a moving picture actor, but disclaimed stardom. However the girls were thrilled at the knowledge of his identity and proceeded to lionize him at once.

Soon, to his regret, Jane Phelps' mother took her away, and he was left tête-à-tête with Miss Ward.

She was not shy but a restraint seemed to fall upon her when left alone with Pinney.

Her round, dimpled face was charming, her short hair was in soft ringlets, not the fuzzy state known as "a permanent." And her deep set eyes were of the sort of violet that changes

from dark blue to grey. Yet she was of the roguish type, Pinney decided, and he was a bit piqued at her sudden hauteur.

"You are alone?" he said, intuitively.

"Yes," she returned, "and so, I don't think I ought to sit here talking to a stranger."

"Now, that's either prudery or—coquetry,—and—I don't know which."

He spoke thoughtfully, his head a bit on one side, and his queer little smile breaking through his solemn air.

She colored a little, and he thought he had never seen a lovelier flush than the pink that came to her cheeks.

"That's a silly speech," she said, with quick asperity. "I've a notion not to speak to you again!"

"There are others," he said, nonchalantly glancing about the car. "I'm attracted to you, I admit, but if you flout me, I can only try again and hope to find a kinder heart."

His imitation of a despairing swain was so humorous that Lora Ward laughed outright.

"But I'm in earnest," she went on. "I've been brought up not to chat with strangers, and—a movie actor, of all things!"

"It is pretty awful," he agreed; "would it help matters any if I tell you that I'm not going to be a movie actor any more?"

"Really? Why not?"

"Well, for one thing,—I don't think it's a real man's job." She looked at him with a sudden, new interest. "And, too," he went on, "I've been fired."

"Fired!"

"Practically. The Hollywood people I've been with seemed to think I'd outworn my welcome, and as I wanted to break loose anyway, I've shaken the dust of California off my feet, I trust forever."

"And what are you going to do?"

"Don't exactly know yet. But I've a new life opening up,—which may lead me in almost any direction."

"What do you mean by a new life? Some unexpected prospect?"

"Just that. Don't ask me about it, I'd rather not tell yet. Perhaps we can meet after I'm settled in my new—prospects."

"Perhaps," she returned and then again lapsed into one of her silences. So lost was she in reverie that Pinney, after a curious glance at her, rose softly and slipped away, apparently without her notice.

"Can't have made much of an impression," he told himself, ruefully. "Guess I'll go back to the original Susie."

The days passed. People became better

acquainted and Pinney met some men whose company he enjoyed even more than that of the chattering girls. Though not a star, he was a popular motion picture actor, and as the report circulated that he was giving up the profession, he was besieged with regrets and queries.

He parried his inquisitors with non-committal statements, and laughingly said that he was giving it up, but might be forced to return to it, if his new prospects fell through. But he took no one into his confidence, and mingled with the passengers, now chumming with the men in the smoker, now chaffing the girls in the observation car, and sometimes talking pleasantly and seriously with the older people.

He was a general favorite because of his unflinching good nature, and quick witted repartee.

He still liked best the three girls whom his unerring eye had first picked out. Of these he preferred Jane Phelps and Lora Ward, the little Ray girl having proved too frothy and gigglesome for his taste.

Not infrequently the three were together, Pinney and his two girl friends, and Mrs. Phelps had come to look on him as one of their party.

One morning, as they were nearing Kansas City, the trio sat chatting and laughing in gay good humor. They were in the day seats of a

sleeper, and Pinney was riding backward, with the two girls opposite him.

Suddenly and without warning came a terrible jolt, an awful noise, and the grinding of brakes. Then a fearful upheaval, a crash, and all the horrors of a head-on collision of two heavy trains.

Pinney's last recollection was of being thrown forward against the two girls, then something heavy crashed down on his head and he knew no more.

His returning consciousness found him in a hospital bed, a white garbed nurse, urging him to take a spoonful of something she offered.

He swallowed obediently, and with mind now perfectly rational and alert, said, "Where am I? and what happened?"

"In a hospital. Train collision," the nurse answered, tersely but not curtly. "Don't think,—go to sleep."

"I'm through sleeping, I'm all right now. I want to get up."

But a single sudden effort to raise his head was too much for him, and he dropped back on his pillow with a groan.

"Whatever ails me?" he asked, weakly.

"You were hit on the head,—stunned. A miracle that you were not killed. You had a very close call. As it is, you'll be all right in a

day or two, if you keep quiet and don't raise any temperature or cut up any foolhardy tricks."

"Don't be cross with me, Nursie," he wheedled, and the grim-faced woman smiled involuntarily.

"Where are the girls?" he asked, suddenly.

"What girls?" she returned.

"The ones I liked, Miss Phelps, Miss Ward and Miss Ray."

"I don't know, but I can find out. There were a great many killed. It was a terrible accident."

"Collision, you say?"

"Yes. They've found out that the engineer fell dead of heart disease, and so the signals were disregarded and a fearful collision followed. The worst accident in years."

"What day is it?"

"Saturday. You've been unconscious forty-eight hours." Pinney pondered.

"Any luggage saved?"

"There's a lot of it, I hear, at the station. When you're able, you can go and pick out yours, if any is there. That little bag on the stand there, you had clutched tightly in your hand when you were brought in."

Pinney glanced at the small handbag, nodded his satisfaction, and turning over closed his eyes for further sleep.

Nor did he awake again to full consciousness till the next day, when he declared himself entirely recovered and impatient to proceed on his journey.

The doctor appeared, advised him to remain quietly in his room for one more day, and then start on, if he chose.

So twenty-four hours more elapsed, during which he amused himself as best he might, and then he was dismissed.

At the hospital office he inquired concerning his train acquaintances.

He was told that reports were conflicting, that many of the dead were unidentified, that some unhurt passengers had gone their ways and that some were yet unconscious in the hospital.

But he was told that Miss Ray and Miss Ward were both killed, while Miss Phelps and her mother had left the hospital the day before.

Sick at heart, Pinney's mind went back to that last merry half hour with the two girls, now both gone forever.

Carrying the little handbag, he went in quest of further luggage. There was a promiscuous pile of it, but only one suitcase of his own could Pinney find. His trunk was missing, doubtless smashed to atoms.

He went to a hotel and registered for a night,

and then to the shops to buy a necessary wardrobe. A large suitcase was his first investment, and he quickly filled it with haberdashery and toilet articles, sufficient to last until he reached his destination. A new suit of clothes was necessary, too, for those he wore were cut and torn.

Back to the hotel for the night, and after a disturbed and sleepless vigil, he resumed next morning the trip so tragically delayed.

In Willowvale, at the Winslow house, preparations were being made for the arrival of the expected Joyce Gilray.

A pleasant suite of two rooms and a bath was assigned to the newcomer, and Mark Winslow himself superintended the furnishings and decorations.

His housekeeper and domestic tyrant, Mrs. Swift, was a capable and efficient woman who ruled her subordinates with a rod of iron.

This ruling at times extended to Mark Winslow, but when that gentleman considered a matter important, he submitted to none of Mrs. Swift's fiats. In trivial things he found it easier to let her have her head than to combat her. But on occasions of personal interest to him, he took the helm and the housekeeper knew better than to insist.

Just now the question at issue was the style of furnishing the new suite.

Mrs. Swift was absolutely positive that the grandchild, Joyce Gilray, was a girl; her argument being that Joyce was a girl's name.

"That doesn't matter," Mark Winslow said, for the twentieth time; "the child was, of course named for his father, and his name was Joyce."

"But a girl could be named for her father, too," retorted the argumentative woman, and Mark was obliged to give her a stern command to do as she was bid and no more words about it.

So the rooms were done up with a view to masculine occupancy, though enough latitude was given to whisk things about should it prove necessary.

The bedroom, with its beautiful Circassian walnut suite would be a joy to any one of gentle tastes, and the chiffonier could be trundled out and a dressing table substituted should such a change be called for.

Likewise the jolly, den-like sitting-room, with its table-desk and smoking paraphernalia could be transformed to a lady's boudoir with a few slight changes of furniture.

A moderate number of good pictures were on the walls, but Mark Winslow wisely left the minor details of the appointments to the taste of the new occupant.

Mrs. James Winslow came over to look at it all.

"I must say it's beautiful," she commented, "but it ought to have been done for my boy. Oh, why couldn't you see that he's the one to succeed you, he's the one to be your heir, your successor! When the time comes, Burr could step into your shoes, both here at home and in your offices, in society or in Directors' meetings. He knows about it all.

"What does this chap coming know? Nothing of your business life, your home or social life. Mark, you have made a great mistake."

"No, Molly, I've made no mistake,—except the grave one of delaying this matter so long. But, thank heaven, it was not too long, and soon now, I shall have my own flesh and blood under my roof."

"When do you expect him?"

"Any day now. He promised to wire the date of his arrival, but I've reason to think he's a bit of a tease, and I shouldn't be surprised to have him drop down on us any minute, without warning. He'll be welcome whenever he comes."

Molly Winslow sniffed a little into her lace handkerchief, keeping a wary eye on her austere relative.

"Will you promise me this, Mark," she said, "if for any reason your grandson does not

please you, will you reinstate Burr in your affections and heirship?"

Winslow laughed. "I'm safe in promising that, for I've no idea my grandson will prove a disappointment. I'm not expecting an old head on young shoulders,—he's only twenty-one,—but I hope he will be pliable and easy to train into my ways and customs."

"Young men of today are not inclined to be very pliable, and I think you'll find a young Westerner even less so than our Eastern people. At any rate, remember you have promised, and I am too fond of my son not to hope that he will seem wiser and better to you in the long run than this untaught cub."

"And Joyce may be a girl," said Mark, his eyes twinkling.

"No, I don't hope for that. I did, but when Burr told me of the manly looking signature and the general masculine tone of the letters, I gave up that hope. And, too, if it had been a girl they would have named the child for Helen. Joyce was of course a boy, and named for the father. Some people insist that Joyce is a girl's name, but it is used for either."

"Joyce Gilray, the father, was named that because it was his mother's maiden name. Of course, Joyce as a surname is not uncommon, and as you say, it is one of the many names

that are used as a Christian name for either sex. Like Leslie or Marion or Sidney."

"Yes, I know it, and like you, I feel sure the young Joyce is a boy,—a young man. But, oh, Mark, it has broken my heart. The whole thing came so suddenly, so unexpectedly,—I can't get used to it."

"Well, Molly, you'll have to get used to it, you've no option in the matter. And here's another thing, you're not to make matters unpleasant for Joyce in any way. If you don't like him, if you resent his presence, simply keep away from the house. But don't you ever dare come around here and stir up trouble! Don't you ever dare hint to the boy that he is supplanting your son or that your son ever had any rights other than those he now has. I won't stand it, do you hear?"

"Yes," said Molly, sullenly, "but you needn't expect me to fawn on him and pat him!"

"I don't! Don't be silly! But if you try any underhand work, I shall know it, and you'll be exceedingly sorry you tried!"

"Of course I sha'n't,—I'm not a fool——"

"You're so precious near one that I don't know——"

"Mark Winslow! Are you insulting me—in your own house!"

"Pouf! A woman like you can't be insulted.

Hush your talk, Molly, and if you know what's best for you and Burr, too, you'll be careful of your steps where my grandson is concerned!"

As she herself would have expressed it, Molly Winslow knew on which side her bread was buttered. She changed her tactics at once, and began to plan for the entertainment of the newcomer. Convinced at last that she could do nothing to avert the impending disaster, she determined to turn it as much as possible to her own advantage, and said, blithely:

"Oh, well, the two young men will be company for each other. They're about the same age——"

"That they're not. Joyce is only twenty-one, while Burr is nearly thirty."

"Oh, well, that's near enough for congenial tastes and pleasures. I'm sure Burr will be only too glad to introduce Joyce about, and get him started in society."

"Don't be a fool, Molly. Do you suppose my grandson will need the introductions of anybody,—other than myself? His place is waiting for him, he has only to accept it, and as soon as he makes his appearance, there will be scores of homes thrown open to him, and scores of men and women both, ready to entertain him."

"Yes, I suppose so. But there are times

when a younger man, like Burr, can take Joyce to places and entertainments that you wouldn't care to attend at your age."

"Meaning silly dance halls or cabarets?"

"Oh, how you misunderstand me, Mark," she sighed plaintively. "All I want is to be nice to your grandchild, and to do anything I can to assist——"

"You can assist best by keeping out of the way. I know you, Molly, your anxiety to help is merely by way of feathering your own nest."

"You are cruel—but be a little careful. You may regret this severe attitude you have taken, —if I don't help you, I may find a way to hinder you——"

"As I've already told you, if you attempt anything mean or tricky, and I know you are quite capable of such an attempt, you will find yourself in much worse case than anything you can inflict on me. Remember that, Madam, and hesitate before you try to make any trouble for me or mine. I am glad Burr is not like you. He is all Winslow, and I have only the truest affection for him."

"Yet if I choose I can bend his will to my own, and if you push me too far, I will."

"If I weren't so disgusted with you, I should be amused." Mark Winslow gave a short laugh.

"No, you wouldn't. You know as well as I

do, that there is a way I can get at you,—can pierce your armor——”

“Oh, hush! Do go away! I’m tired of your veiled threats. If you’ve anything to say, come out and say it!”

“Some day I may, but not now.”

And then Burr’s mother gathered up her wraps and departed.

It was that night that the evening papers from the city brought the news of the terrible train wreck.

Mark Winslow was horrified. He sent at once for Burr, always his friend and advisory assistant.

“Do you suppose Joyce was on that train?” he asked, wild-eyed with horror and apprehension.

“There’s no mention of his name in the reports, either of saved or lost,” Burr returned. “I’ve searched carefully, and can find nothing. Perhaps the morning papers will tell us more. And remember, Uncle Mark, it’s the merest chance that he would be on the train. We only know that he planned to leave San Francisco about that time. We’ve no reason as yet to conclude that he left that very day, or even by that route.”

“No, that’s so. You’re always a comfort,

Burr. But I must know. I can't bear the uncertainty. You see if he is killed, it may be a long time, if ever, before his identity is established. How can I get definite word,—at once?"

"But Joyce said he'd telegraph exactly when we might expect his arrival."

"I know,—but he isn't very punctilious in keeping promises. And when I asked him especially to wire me regarding his sex, he didn't respond. I dare say he's a bit rattlebrained. Isn't it strange not to know at all what his disposition or attainments may be. Sometimes it seems as if I couldn't wait to see him!"

"Suppose we wait a day or so, and see if the papers give us any further information or if any word comes from Joyce, and then put in some inquiries."

Winslow agreed to this, but two days passed without any news whatever, and the impatient old man could stand it no longer.

So Burr telegraphed to a Detective agency in Kansas City, for their agent to use every means in his power to ascertain if Joyce Gilray was on the wrecked train, and what his fate had been.

In due time the report came that no such name was on the list of the conductor or porters, that no luggage had been found bearing the name or initials of Joyce Gilray, and that the hospitals had received no patient of that name.

In fact the detective could find no hint or trace of such a person, and Mark Winslow was much relieved in consequence.

And then, a few days later, as Winslow sat alone, at dusk, in his library, he heard the door-bell ring.

He heard the door opened, he heard steps in the hall, and then a voice rang gaily out.

“Hello, Grandfather, here’s your Joyce Gilray!”

CHAPTER IV

THE ARRIVAL

MARK WINSLOW did not spring up at the sound of that voice, instead, he settled back in his chair, and a broad smile of satisfaction spread across his handsome old face.

"Thank God," he cried out, even before seeing the newcomer, "you are a man!"

For the deep bass voice had a quick enunciation and a virile, ringing tone that put to flight all fears of a granddaughter.

And then the owner of the voice appeared in the doorway, and with a bound was at Mark Winslow's side and had grasped the two old, welcoming hands in a firm, young grip.

Jenks, the butler, who had admitted the visitor, and who stood, consumed with curiosity, in the doorway, snapped on the lights, and Mark Winslow saw his newfound heir.

A man of medium height, good features, humorous smile and general air of happiness and content.

Still holding his hands, Mark Winslow gazed long and steadily into the smiling face.

“Not a bit like your mother,” he said, with a slight look of disappointment.

“No, and I’m sorry,” said the other; “I’m the image of my father, I believe, and I daresay that’s no satisfaction to you. But, I say, Grandfather, try me out, and let me stand or fall on my own merits. Don’t make me feel it’s a handicap to look like my dad, and don’t make me feel guilty not to look like my blessed mother. Give me a chance to make good on my own. Then, if I fail, send me adrift, and you’ll be no worse off than before.”

“Nonsense, my boy, I’m not thinking seriously of your looks, though I had hoped you’d remind me of Helen. Now, we’ll leave our long talk till after dinner, but just give me a slight inkling of your life,——”

“That’s what I want to do, and I want to get it off my chest at once, for on hearing it, you may withdraw your welcome. Listen, Granddad. My father, Joyce Gilray, for whom, of course, I was named, died when I was a kid of six. I don’t remember him well at all. Then later, mother married again, and I got along all right with my stepfather as long as she lived. But when I was fourteen, mother died, and after, that, I couldn’t stand the man. We were utterly

uncongenial. I had an annuity,—mother invested the money you sent her for me,—and I broke loose from home, and set up for myself. Now, here's the sticker. I went in for the movies. I was always an athletic chap, fond of daredevil stunts, lariat-throwing, hard riding and that sort of thing. So, having a chance, I went on the movie stage, and I've been on it ever since. I never became a star, but I made good in my specialty work, and I enjoyed the life. But I didn't think it right to use the Gilray name, for so many people are prejudiced against the picture stage, and I made up the name of Tom Pinney and used that. I'm telling you this frankly, and at first, so if you are shocked and pained too deeply, you can give me my walking papers at once."

Mark Winslow looked at him blankly. A grandson of his a moving picture actor! It was a shock. For Winslow was conservative, even old foggy, and he scorned the vulgar entertainments known as *The Movies* with all the strength of his aristocratic old soul.

The younger man sensed this, and sat, with unmoved countenance, waiting for the decisive word.

But the silence lasted so long that he grew restless and at last said, "Well, Grandfather, what's the verdict? Can't you forgive it?"

Perhaps he couldn't have chosen a more effective phrase, for back to Mark Winslow's memory flashed the words of the little child; "Ferdiv—ferdiv——"

"Yes," he said, suddenly, shaking his silvery curls as if shaking off a bad dream, "Yes, Joyce Gilray, I am going to forgive and forget that you have been a moving picture actor. And I ask you to forget it, too. I want you never to refer to it, never to tell me any more about it than you have now told me, never to talk of it to any one else. Simply ignore the subject and try to forget it. I take it for granted you are willing to do this?" he looked up inquiringly. "If not,—if you have any hankering to continue that profession, then——"

"Good gracious, no, Grandfather! I'm only too glad to be rid of it for ever. I want to devote my life to yours, to follow any course of conduct you suggest, to be a real comfort and help to you and to be a loving, dutiful grandson always. But, in honesty, I must tell you this. I achieved a certain sort of reputation, because of my really daredevil spirit in attempting and succeeding in dangerous stunts, and also, because of a funny little one-sided smile, which I cultivated, and which caught on with the audiences. I tell you this, because it is quite on the cards that films containing my pictures may be shown in New

York, and perhaps even here in Willowvale. I should of course, be recognized. If this should happen, and if it would cause you embarrassment or annoyance, perhaps I'd better not remain here. You see, the films with my picture in them may never be shown in this part of the country at all; they're not nation famous pictures,—but, then, again, they might happen to turn up,—and, there you are."

Again Winslow was silent. Again there passed through his mind, like an undersong, "Ferdiv—ferdiv——"

Then, with a smile, he leaned forward, took the movie actor's hands in his own, and said, "It's all right. Don't worry about it. As I said forget it, and I shall forget it, and if it ever crops up, if the pictures of you are ever shown here, we will meet the emergency when it arises. Meantime, forget the subject, never refer to it, to me or to any one else. I accept you as my grandson, Joyce Gilray, and—er,—Tom Pinney is buried in oblivion."

"That suits me all right, I've no desire ever to disturb his bones. Now, don't you want the papers and proofs of my identity?"

"Leave all that until after dinner. My lawyer and my grand nephew——"

"Burr?" said Joyce, quickly.

"Yes, Burr. And by the way, Joyce, he's

pretty sore at being supplanted, for he had fully expected to be my heir. But when you came on the carpet, I had to tell him of the new state of things."

"How did he take it?"

"Like a man and a gentleman. Burr is a mighty fine fellow, and I shall do all I can to make it up to him,—but,—" the old man looked wistful, "of course I preferred my own grandson to my brother's grandson."

"I hope I sha'n't be a disappointment, Grandfather," and the queer little one-sided smile came into view.

"That's a funny trick of yours," Winslow said, "is that smile natural or acquired?"

"Both. I always smiled like that, unconsciously, and then, when it began to be looked on as an attraction, I cultivated and exaggerated it."

"Well, all right, but in so far as you find it possible, omit it."

Winslow's tone was dictatorial, and impulsively Gilray voiced his resentment.

"I will do my best to lose it, but I'd rather say right now, if it's going to bother you, or if you still feel that my picture career rankles, I prefer not to stay here. In fact, I don't want to stay unless I'm absolutely and entirely welcome, in spite of my shortcomings and drawbacks."

"You are welcome, my boy, without reserva-

tions or exceptions. And I like you the better for your independent spirit. I'm sure the matter of proofs and that sort of thing will be a mere formality, and then I shall take you into my heart and home as my loved and cherished grandson. Now, Jenks will take you to your room. Dinner is at seven-thirty. You have your bags?"

"They're in Mr. Gilray's room, sir," said the ubiquitous Jenks, who had not been able to tear himself away from the hall door, throughout the interview.

Joyce Gilray, as we must now call him,—Tom Pinney being forgotten,—felt a thrill as he went up the broad staircase for the first time. A son of the house, he belonged in all this beauty and luxury. Save for the formality of his identification, which would take but a few moments when he showed his papers and other proofs, he was the acknowledged grandson of Mark Winslow and had a right to the deference and respect even now being shown him by the obsequious butler.

Mrs. Swift, the housekeeper, was awaiting him in his rooms and she curtsied in the old fashioned manner that Winslow's home seemed to demand.

Gilray was enchanted. He liked this atmosphere of old retainers and formal attentions.

He smiled pleasantly,—and a bit crookedly,—at Mrs. Swift, whose heart was won at once by this charming new member of the family.

“We made the rooms for you, as best we knew, Mr. Joyce,” she said; “your tastes will be consulted as to further furnishings.”

“They’re fine, Mrs. Swift, just fine. I’ll make a few little personal additions, and then they will be simply perfection. Beautiful outlook both ways, too.”

“Yes sir, Mr. Winslow gave you the best in the house. I do hope you’ll be comfortable.”

And Gilray was comfortable. As he dressed for dinner, he whistled softly to himself, in sheer delight at the luxury and convenience everywhere.

He stood before the mirror, and after a crooked, little one-sided smile at his own reflection there, he began to practise on a straight, well-balanced smile that should better please his grandfather and have no reminiscence of the smile that made his pictures famous.

“Guess it’s the smile that won’t come off,” he meditated, ruefully, as his attempts at improvement oftenest turned back to the objectionable grin. “I’ll have to cultivate a serious and solemn demeanor, where no smile is needed.”

But he went down to dinner, determined to conquer that funny smile of his.

The dinner was perfect. Not too elaborate, but bountiful and of the best. The table appointments, the flowers and lights were all of harmonious beauty, and again Gilray felt that sense of elation at belonging in these congenial conditions.

Ignoring the past, he chatted easily with his grandfather of current events, of the charms of the far West, and of casual subjects, proving himself a delightful conversationalist and a ready and willing listener.

He made no reference to the train wreck for he deemed that no topic to introduce at a dinner-table.

When they adjourned to the library, to smoke Mark's choice cigars, Gilray opened the conversation by a reference to the accident.

"Yes, I read of it," said Winslow.

"I was in it," said Joyce, quietly.

"You were! Why, my boy, how dreadful! You weren't hurt?"

"Only a dislocation and slight break of the forefinger of my right hand. The doctor pulled it straight, but it is very lame, and will take some months to heal. But, it was a terrible experience."

"Tell me all about it,—the others won't be here for a half hour yet."

So Gilray detailed the principal points of his

trip East. He told of the acquaintances he made, mentioning the attractive girls and the interesting men with whom he had been friendly. Then he told of the sudden fearful accident, and how he was unconscious for forty-eight hours, waking up in the Kansas City hospital, with no more lasting injury than the broken finger.

He told how two of the girls he had known, and several of the men had been killed, and told of the kindness of the nurse and the doctors in the hospital.

“And all my luggage was lost,” he concluded, “except one suitcase and the small bag that holds the papers that were my mother’s. That I kept always by me, and the nurse told me it was clutched in my hand when I was picked up unconscious. A lucky thing, Grandfather, for most of the bags in the sleepers were ground to atoms, or burned.”

“A terrible experience indeed, Joyce, and I thank God your life was spared. Now, as is my principle with all distressing or unpleasant things, let us strive to forget it. That then, explains your delayed arrival?”

“Yes; and when I came to my senses, I thought only of getting here as quickly as possible. I just bought a few necessary things in Kansas City and by good luck, my dinner clothes were in the suit case that I salvaged.

So, all's well that ends well, and here I am, and very glad to be here.

"I'm not given to gushing, Granddad, but let me say once for all, how I love and thank you for calling me to you, how glad I am to be here, and how hard I shall try to make myself welcome and worthy of all your kindness."

"That's all right, boy, I'm sure we shall get along. Time must prove that,—for of course, this evening we are both on our best behaviour. I warn you that I'm not always so urbane and gracious. I can, upon occasion, be about as irascible and hard to get along with as anybody you ever saw!"

"You've nothing on me," returned Joyce, cheerfully. "I've the devil's own temper, once it gets roused. And now that we know the worst, let's, as you say, forget it."

Mark Winslow laughed. He was learning to like his grandson more every minute, and he greatly preferred the independent spirit he showed to a more servile or fawning one.

Burr Winslow came then, followed shortly by the lawyer, Barry.

Burr's greeting was frank and cordial. He was determined that no spirit of petty jealousy or envy should mar his relations with his new cousin.

"For we are cousins," he said, smiling, "though once or twice removed."

"Yes," said Joyce, "and unless you're a sort of an angel, you must hate me for butting in here."

"I'm not going to pretend it gives me unmixed pleasure," said Burr, honestly, seeing that frankness was in order, "but I hope I am a good loser and I offer you the hand of friendship."

Gilray gave him a hearty handshake, and a smile which he cut off suddenly, lest it be a crooked one.

Martin Barry was not so urbane. He was civil, but he looked at the stranger with a critical eye and a grave face.

"First of all," he said, "we want to see the credentials our claimant brings."

"Quite right," agreed Joyce. "Shall I get them at once?"

He left the room, and shortly returned with the small handbag that he had clutched so tightly during his lapse from consciousness at the time of the collision.

"Do you recognize the bag, Grandfather?" he asked.

"No," Mark said, after an examination of the outside.

"Well, perhaps you've never seen it before. But it is one my mother carried away with her when she ran away to get married."

Mark Winslow examined the bag with interest.

A moderate sized handbag of dark maroon leather, somewhat faded by age, and worn in places, but still a smart, decent looking bag. On its side appeared the letters H. M. W.

“Helen Margaret Winslow,” Mark murmured gazing at the initials, once gilt, now dull and inconspicuous. “I do remember, now, buying this bag for Helen soon after she left school. Yes, I remember it distinctly.”

“You don’t know anything about Joyce Gilray, my father, after they were married?”

“No,” and Mark Winslow flushed a little. “I cut them off entirely, I’m sorry for it now,—but it’s too late for that. Ignore my attitude in the past, Joyce, and tell a straightforward story, so far as you know it, of your parents’ early life.”

“Of course, I know the main details,” the young man returned; “soon after they were married and settled in Los Angeles, my father became an actor. Not a Movie actor, they weren’t known then, but he went on the regular stage. He was a moderate success, and earned enough to keep his wife and child comfortably. I was the child, of course,—their only child. When I was about four, we moved to Santa Barbara, and when I was six, my father died. Two years later, my mother married again,—”

“Pardon an interruption,” Barry put in, “but

why was there no record of a Joyce Gilray in the newspaper reports of the railroad accident or on the conductor's passenger lists?"

Joyce Gilray's face showed a slowly rising flush, and he looked decidedly embarrassed. Then, with a sudden, impatient fling of his shoulders, he said,

"That is what I have to explain. Grandfather, to you I have confessed what may now seem to you a disgrace. If so, I beg of you to say so at once, and let me go back to exile. For, I could not stay here with you, if you feel regret or strong disapproval of my past career."

Barry and Burr looked at him in astonishment. What could this young chap have to confess that would be as serious as his tone and look portended?

The lawyer looked at him suspiciously; Burr, with a slight apprehension; but Mark Winslow gazed calmly at him, and said, "Tell it all, Joyce."

"It's all told in a few words. I have been a Moving Picture actor for the last seven years."

The speaker watched closely the faces of his listeners. He saw surprise, even distaste on the faces of Burr and Barry, but Mark preserved his air of extreme calm and his features gave no sign of disapproval.

"When I was fourteen my mother died. I

never liked my stepfather and he had no affection for me. So when I told him I meant to start out for myself, he made no objection to my leaving him. The money you sent my mother, Grandfather, she put into an annuity for me. It was enough to support me and keep me at school, but soon, I became infatuated with the Moving pictures, and from that it was but a step to get into the game myself.

“But I thought best not to link up the Gilray name with my efforts, lest I fail and bring disgrace upon my father’s name. Of course, I inherit from him whatever dramatic talent I may possess, and after a few years of hard work, I made good. I was always a daredevil chap. As a child, no stunt was too difficult or dangerous for me to attempt, and I never minded bumps or bruises. I became a good all-round athlete, I whirled the lariat and I rode unbroken mounts. Incidentally I broke a bone now and then, but they healed up quickly and I was back at my work.

“As I was saying, I chose a new name for myself, and I selected that of Tom Pinney. I picked that out for no reason save that it was euphonious, and had sort of a jolly sound. Mr. Barry, you will doubtless find the name of Tom Pinney on the train lists.”

There was a long pause as Joyce finished this

part of his tale, and at last Mark Winslow spoke.

"I'm glad you have told frankly of your work," he said; "I will not attempt to deny that it is a bit of a shock to me. I had never thought to have any of my kin on the Moving Picture stage——"

"That's enough, Grandfather," and Gilray rose to his feet. "I understand your feelings and appreciate your prejudices. I will go away at once. I'd rather not stay under your sufferance. But I do want to say, that even before I read your advertisement in the magazine, I had definitely given up the pictures, and was about starting for the East, to look up some more dignified occupation."

"Now, Joyce, don't fly off at a tangent!" Mark exclaimed. "I sha'n't let you go away. I want you here, always. And I'm glad to hear you say that you gave up that business voluntarily, for I certainly should have stipulated that you do so as soon as I got hold of you. I shall put you in my offices and give you a chance to make good as a business man. Does that please you? You don't want to be an idler, do you?"

"Indeed, no. I am only too glad to be taken into your business, and I shall do my best. But I fear I shall have to begin at the bottom of the ladder, as I've had no real business training in my life."

“Well, you shall have a few months vacation first, to get used to your new relatives and new surroundings. Now, go ahead, boy, show me what else you have in that old bag of your mother’s.”

Joyce took from the bag many packets of papers; some letters, some documents. Some tied with faded ribbons, some with string; and some bound by rubber bands, so dried that they broke when touched.

With reverent and trembling hands Mark Winslow picked up the papers and examined them one by one. As he read them, he passed them over to Barry.

At the sight of his daughter’s marriage certificate, the old man broke down, and sobbed audibly.

But his strong nerves soon recovered their poise, and he went through the rest of the papers hastily.

“I shall look these over and study them at my leisure,” he said; “now, I’ll just run through them and note their contents. This packet of letters seems to be from Joyce Gilray to Helen, written during a brief separation. The merest glance at their contents proves their deep love and trust in each other, and I shall read them with a reverent affection.”

“Yes, Grandfather, keep them all and read them at your convenience.”

"Some I may not care to read," and Winslow gave a sudden start. "Here is the letter I wrote disowning Helen. I think I can't bear to realize my hardheartedness and cruelty——"

"No, don't, Grandfather. Let the dead past bury its dead. You thought then you had cause for righteous indignation,—and, too, no regret or remorse now, can do my mother any good. So, try to forget it, and let me try to make up to you for the long years you've been alone."

"Yes, Joyce, you are right—ah, here is a picture of Helen with her little baby,—you, Joyce, I suppose."

"Yes," and the young man smiled at the wide-eyed infant in the photograph. "Though that kid looks little like the Tom Pinney who jumps hurdles and shoots bandits on the screen."

Winslow looked up suddenly.

"No reference to those things, if you please," he said sternly, and Joyce begged his pardon very gravely.

There were many other things in the bag,—letters that Helen had started to her father, but had never finished. Newspaper clippings, a few bills and advertisements, lots of odds and ends that Winslow put back to examine later.

"Where is the amethyst cross?" said Barry, suddenly, and Joyce replied:

"In the little inside pocket of the bag."

CHAPTER V

TWO YOUNG MEN

MARTIN BARRY was not a large man, he was slightly built and of what is known as the dapper type. Meticulously careful in his dress, precise of speech and manner, punctilious as to etiquette and absolutely lacking in a sense of humor, he had been Mark Winslow's legal adviser for many years, and knew all the details of his client's business life and also of his home and social life.

Barry had been consulted, or rather informed in the matter of advertising for Joyce Gilray, and though he had expressed no disapproval, yet he had doubts as to the wisdom of such a course.

But though Mark Winslow paid his lawyer for legal advice, he rarely accepted any other sort of advice from anybody, and he had put through his advertising plan himself, and brought about what seemed to him a most satisfactory result.

But Barry was a careful lawyer, and to his mind Joyce must prove his identity in every possible way, so it was only to be on the safe side, that Barry stuck to his questioning.

The amethyst cross, Mark Winslow had long ago told the lawyer, was a jewel that had once been the property of his grandmother, and descending, in direct line had come into Helen's possession as the fourth owner in the Winslow family, and the natural presumption was that it would now belong to Joyce.

At a nod from Joyce, Barry felt in the pocket of the bag, and produced a small box, from which he took the trinket it contained.

It was an antique piece of jewelry, a cross of hand carved silver, set with pure, lucent, purple stones. It was not very valuable, and not so very beautiful, but as a means of identification it had great value.

Mark Winslow took it and turned it to see the back. There was engraved, Mary Adams Winslow, 1827.

"That's the cross that was my grandmother's," he said, with a touch of pride. See, the name,—grandmother's name was Adams before she was married. And it came down to me, there being no girls in our family, and I gave it to Helen the day she graduated. Didn't she tell you that, Joyce?"

"Yes, Grandfather. I remember that cross as long as I remember anything. Mother often wore it. She said she loved to watch its purple lights and gleams. They're very fine stones, she said."

"Yes," Mark agreed. "To be sure, amethysts are not really precious stones, but these are good ones, and the antique setting makes it a worthwhile piece. But its real value to me, is in its associations, of course. Will you keep it, Joyce, or shall I put it away for you against the time when you may present it to a wife?"

"You keep it, Grandfather. And you may have to safeguard it for some time, for I've no wife in view."

Meantime, Martin Barry was examining the cross with the greatest care.

"What's the matter, Martin?" said Winslow. "Do you think I can't recognize my own family heirloom?"

"Of course you can," Barry returned, a little shortly. "But it's astonishing how bright the engraving looks after all these years."

A slight flush rose to Gilray's cheeks.

"I can explain that," he said, after a moment's hesitation. "There's no reason why I shouldn't, either. I met a girl, with whom I thought I was in love. I thought I would ask her to marry me. This was about three or four months ago. And in the anticipation, I had the cross cleaned up at a jeweler's. But—well, I decided she was not the girl for me, and the matter never went any further."

"I'm glad of it, Joyce," said Winslow. "I'm glad you're still heartwhole and can choose a wife from among the associates you will make here. Any more questions, Barry?"

"Why did you leave us in doubt as to whether you were a man or a girl?" the lawyer asked, looking at Gilray a little quizzically.

The young man laughed outright.

"It seemed so funny to me to be taken for a girl, that I thought I'd turn the joke back on Grandfather, and keep him guessing. I sort of hoped he'd rather have me a man, and I just wanted to tease him a bit. But after the railroad accident, I had no more thought of jokes. I thought then only of getting here as soon as I could, and getting away from those horrible scenes and recollections."

Gilray gave an involuntary shudder at the thoughts he had conjured up and Mark turned a sympathizing face toward him.

"I'm going to try to make you forget it, Joyce. You had a narrow escape, and I thank God your life was spared. Now, I think, Barry, there's no occasion for formalities or redtape. There need be no adoption or other papers, I simply have found my grandson, and I take him into my home and my life. In no sense do I disown Burr or feel a whit less affection and respect for him than I always have felt. He

is my brother's grandson, and as such, is dear to me. But my own grandson is a closer tie, and a more natural heir to my estate. Burr understands all this, and if he feels friendly with Joyce, all well and good. And if he doesn't ———"

"Don't go on, Uncle Mark, for I do feel friendly toward my new cousin, and I don't want to know what would happen if I didn't!" said Burr.

His frank smile was so obviously sincere, and his outstretched hand so cordial, that Joyce gave it a hearty shake.

"Good old Burr," he said, "you're all my mother pictured you."

"What did she say about Burr?" Barry asked, quickly.

Joyce turned toward him and answered, slowly.

"She said many things. My mother seemed to be fond of her cousin Burr. She told me that at the time she was married Burr was a mere boy, about eight or ten years old, I think, but that he was a manly and handsome little fellow. As you know, she never saw him again."

"Burr wasn't at your mother's wedding."

"Lord, man, I know that! Nobody was,—that is, nobody but two witnesses. It was a runaway marriage,—I say, Granddad, there's a

journal of mother's among those papers,—you'll like to read that, I know."

"Yes, Joyce, I shall,—after a time. These crowding memories are disturbing. I think I'll ask you all to leave me for a little."

"Yes," and Joyce sprang to his feet. "I'm a brute not to realize how these things must be tiring you out. Come on, Burr, show me about the house a bit."

The two young men went off together, and Barry, too, rose to depart.

"What's the matter with you, Martin?" queried Winslow, a little petulantly. "You seem upset at Joyce's advent."

"No,—not if you're sure that he is your grandson. He doesn't look a bit like his mother——"

"But he's very like his father. I don't say I wouldn't rather he'd look like the Winslows, but he's a fine appearing, well set up chap, and I'm proud of him. Now you stop this questioning attitude. If you doubt his identity, and I don't see how you can after his proofs, keep your doubts to yourself,—they're of no interest to me. I'm satisfied that he is my daughter's child, and I suppose I'm the one to judge."

"Oh, yes, of course,—of course, Mr. Winslow, —and I haven't any real doubts, but it's always well to make assurance doubly sure."

“Well, make your assurance sure as many times as you like, but don’t bother me about it,—and, especially, don’t bother Joyce. He’s had a hard life, and that terrible accident has shaken his nerves a little. I shall do my best to give him a happy time and help him to forget the past. And, another thing, there’s no need to say anything about his Moving Picture career, unless it becomes necessary later. If any one spots his picture on the screen, and speaks to you about it, send him to me, and then if necessary, I’ll own up frankly. But what folks don’t know won’t hurt ’em, and I prefer to keep that matter quiet if we can. And we’ll wait for some reference to it from an outsider, before we refer to it ourselves.”

Barry agreed deferentially and took a respectful leave of his client, whom he was far from wishing to offend. Mark Winslow’s business affairs were widespread, and often complicated, and Martin Barry would have been very sorry to lose his post of chief legal adviser to the millionaire.

Meantime the two younger men were exploring the house. Without being old enough to be of antiquarian interest, it was a fine old mansion, and Joyce expressed most enthusiastic admiration.

“This was your mother’s room,” Burr said, pausing at a closed door and then opening it.

"For a time, Uncle Mark kept it shut up, but he's a sensible sort, and he finally decided to open it up and use it as a guest room."

"Does he entertain much?" Joyce inquired.

"Yes, a good bit. Dinner parties and that, and now and then, people over the week end. Pretty room, isn't it?"

It was a pretty room, and furnished in the fashion of a bygone day yet still tasteful and attractive.

"Mother told me about it," Joyce said, in a reminiscent tone. "I can imagine her sitting at that dressingtable, combing out her long blonde hair."

"Blonde?" said Burr, "it was dark brown hair. I remember cousin Helen well, though I was but a little chap when she was here."

"It was dark brown when she was a girl," Joyce said, "but later, she bleached it, and it was a pale ash blonde. I'd forgotten it, but one day, I remember now, I overheard my nurse telling another servant that my mother bleached her hair. She spoke as if it were a heinous sin to do so and I ran to mother and asked her what it meant. She only laughed and told me little boys mustn't ask questions. So I ran off and forgot all about it. But the pale blonde was effective with her dark eyes——"

"Dark blue eyes——"

“Yes, deep blue, almost black. And they looked even darker, I suppose with pale colored hair. She must have been a beautiful girl,—but her last years were not happy ones and she faded early. Poor mother. If only Grandfather could have relented during her lifetime.”

“Come on over to my house and see mother,” Burr suggested. “It isn’t late, and she’s crazy to meet you.”

They went the few blocks to Burr’s home, and Joyce met Molly Winslow for the first time.

“Well, young man,” she said, with a wry smile, “so you’ve come here to dash all my hopes and ambitions for this son of mine.”

Taking his cue from her bantering tone, Joyce replied, “Well, you see, Mrs. Winslow, I chanced to be the grandson of Mark, while your son happens to be the grandson of Matthew.”

“Yes, I know it, but since you had been lost in oblivion all these years, I think you might have staid so.”

“Come, come, mother,” objected Burr, “that’s no way to greet our cousin. We’ve already accepted the situation,—now, make the best of it. Such remarks as you’re making won’t get you anywhere. I want Joyce to like you,—to love you,—and he can’t if you don’t make him welcome.”

"I don't blame you at all, Mrs. Winslow," Joyce said, "I've already been made welcome by my grandfather, and I feel I ought not to expect a very warm welcome from you people, whose plans are all upset by my appearance on the scene."

"First, don't call me Mrs. Winslow." Molly said, "let it be Molly,—or, Cousin Molly. I'm not an old woman, you know. Second, don't mistake my attitude. Burr may admit your claim and may accept your presence with equanimity—I don't. At first I doubted if you really were Joyce Gilray,—I mean if you really were Helen's child. But I've heard enough from the people over at Mark's house, to know that you're undoubtedly all that you claim to be, and so, I can't pull on that string. Now, I can only hope that you're a wild youth, or even a bad one, and that your Grandfather will soon get enough of you and send you packing."

"Mother!" begged Burr, but Joyce took the matter lightly.

"I hate to disoblige a lady," he said, smiling, "but even for you, Cousin Molly, I can't agree to rob a bank or sow a crop of wild oats. I'm an adventurous sort, I love danger and daring, but crime is out of my line. Any other favors you ask, I'll be glad to consider."

"You seem to have your mother's light-

hearted gayety," Molly Winslow observed, "and I suppose your Western bringing up accounts for your breezy manner. Have you always had all the money you wanted?"

"Not all I wanted, all of the time. But sometimes I did."

"And you were a good fellow when you had it, I'll be bound."

"Mother," Burr put in, "remember, Joyce is only twenty-one. He hasn't had time to have a very adventurous life."

"Twenty-one!" exclaimed Molly, "he looks quite as old as you do, Burr."

"Oh, no," Burr said, "I'm thirty."

"And I'm nearly twenty-two," Joyce said, "but you see, Cousin Molly, I've been on my own since I was fourteen, and that makes a chap look older than he really is. And I had to work hard a lot of the time, to make money."

"You had an annuity from your mother——"

"Yes, but not a very large one."

"You still have that?"

"I hope so, but the papers are in a suitcase that was lost in the train wreck. Even in my unconsciousness I clung to the small bag that held my mother's papers, but another bag that held my own papers was lost. Still, I daresay the annuity matter can be fixed up."

"And if not, you won't need it now. You've

a rich grandfather, and you'll never want for money again."

Molly Winslow spoke bitterly, for she had only hate in her heart for this interloper who had snatched the golden spoon from her son's mouth and thrust it into his own.

Somewhat gravely, Gilray took leave of his cousins and went back to the Winslow house alone.

He looked in the library, and found Mark Winslow sitting at the table immersed in the perusal of the papers Joyce had brought him.

The old man lifted a face that showed traces of tears, but he smiled at his grandson.

"Come in, boy. Always come in, without invitation. You're mine now, part of my household, my home, my life. Oh, Joyce, I'm glad you are not a girl child!"

"If I had known, Grandfather, how anxious you were on that point I shouldn't have perpetrated that silly joke. I am not given to that sort of thing, I don't know why I did it in this case. But it struck me as a gay little trick, and I fell for the notion."

"I was sure you were a boy, from that masculine signature to your first letter.

"Yes, I sling a bold sort of signature, though, like many other people, my autograph isn't like my other penmanship. But Lord knows

when I'll ever write again. My busted finger is a bit painful tonight. Tomorrow, I think I'll show it to your family practitioner. Maybe there's a slight infection——"

"Oh, my boy, don't go and die of blood poisoning, when I've just got you here!"

"Never fear, Grandfather. I'm a tough nut, and I've had far closer calls than a broken finger."

"Well, we'll have Doctor Graham over first thing in the morning. Tonight, you let Mrs. Swift take a look at it. She's as good as a trained nurse. Now, about your immediate future, Joyce, I want you to take a couple of months, say, to look about and get acquainted. Then, in the fall I'd like you to go into my offices and become a first class business man and able eventually to handle all my affairs."

"That sounds good to me, and make the vacation season as short as you like. I only want time enough to pull myself together, get some proper clothes, and chum with the neighbors a bit. I'm a sociable sort, and if there are young people in the neighborhood, I'd like to meet them."

"Yes, of course,—of course. And there is a delightful younger set. Now, you shall have an allowance that will not be a miserly one, and if at any time it seems insufficient, it shall be

increased. I'm not afraid to talk to you like this, for I can read character fairly well, and I judge you are no spendthrift, though I want you to have everything you want that money can get for you."

"Dear Grandfather, you're too good to me," and Gilray's tone was full of deep gratitude. "I can never repay such kindness——"

"Cut out that sort of talk, boy. You can repay me by faithful affectionate loyalty,—other than that I do not ask. And more or less of your society. I know crabbed age and youth and so forth, but I'm going to ask for a portion of your time, and the rest you may give to your young friends."

"There'll be no trouble about that, sir. I'm proud that you care for my society."

Going to his room, Gilray found Mrs. Swift hovering about, like a motherly hen, waiting for her chicken.

She examined the troublesome finger, and declared it was but a slight injury and would soon be all right again. She treated it with disinfectants and bound it up with all the skill of a trained nurse.

"Bully for you, Mrs. Swift," exclaimed Gilray. "You've had hospital experience?"

"Just a bit of war nursing," returned the smiling lady. "Now, Mr. Joyce, if there's

anything amiss with your quarters or if you want anything at all just let me know, and I'll make it all right."

"Mrs. Swift, I believe I have everything in this world but trouble. I don't seem to see any sign of that."

"Bless us, Mr. Joyce, don't say such things! Why, that's as good as asking for trouble! My Heavens, how can you talk so?"

"Nonsense, that was but a joke. For, truly, I've everything that heart can wish, and prospect of further blessings to come."

"I think you have your mother's happy disposition, sir. She was always joyous and gay."

"I hope I am like her in many ways, I revere her memory——"

"You don't look one bit like her, Mr. Joyce."

"No, I'm told I'm the image of my father——"

"Your father! Lord, you don't look any more like him than I do!"

"You knew him, then?"

"I should say I did. Why, I've been here ever since Mr. Winslow built this house. Your father,—I knew him better than Mr. Winslow did himself. You see, as housekeeper then, I had to do with the kitchen and the cooking,—I don't now. But that chauffeur ate many a meal of my preparing and enjoyed it, too. To

begin with you're twice his size. Gilray was a little chap."

"Oh, average size, Mrs. Swift. I knew my father myself, you see, until I was six years old, when he died. Even a kid of six can remember a man's appearance."

"That's just it, sir. To a baby his father always looks a big man."

"All right, I'll grant he was no giant."

"And not only that, but you've no facial resemblance. Why, Gilray's face was long and thin,—yours is almost round——"

"Well, Mrs. Swift, I'm sorry not to be more like my parents, either of them,—but I can't see as it makes any real difference to any of us."

The tone was a little curt, for Joyce was tired of the woman's chatter and wanted to be rid of her.

Mrs. Swift took the hint, and after looking about the room to see that the maid had arranged all properly for the night, she bowed her way out.

Joyce Gilray went to the mirror and gazed at his own face.

"Guess I'm not as much like my father as I thought," he murmured, half aloud. "Yet I've been told all my life that I was the image of him." Here the funny little crooked smile came to his features.

“Also, I’ve got to cut out that grin,” he went on, thoughtfully. “Grandfather doesn’t like it,—and I don’t blame him. It’s an asset in the movies, but not in society. Well, I’ll practice on a better one.”

And for a full half hour, the whimsical fellow stood before the glass, smiling politely, even sweetly, and actually acquiring a conventional smile that he felt sure he could remember to use on all occasions.

Getting ready for bed, he looked with distaste on his inexpensive pajamas and simple toilet appointments.

“You bet I’ll get some things that will fit into this scenery,” he told himself, glancing round the beautiful and comfortable rooms.

And then he plunged into bed to dream of his happy future and his coming joys.

Below stairs the servants discussed the newcomer.

“Not a bit like father or mother,” declared Mrs. Swift importantly. “I’ve been a putting him to bed, and I couldn’t see a bit of likeness.”

“Not in his face, no,” agreed Jenks, the old butler. “But I’ll say, Mrs. Swift, he has the traits of both. Why, his gay, jolly way is for all the world like Miss Helen, bless her. And his big, masterful manner is the way Gilray used to act.”

“Gilray was a little man——”

“I know that, but he had a big way with him. High-handed, masterful,—that’s what Gilray was when he was our chauffeur. And young Joyce is like that. He’ll stand up to his grandfather, too, if the time comes. Oh, yes, now it’s all honey and cream, but that young chap has a will of his own, or I miss my guess! That’s like his mother, too. Did Miss Helen have a will of her own? Well, *did* she! When her father wouldn’t let her marry Gilray, what did she do? She took the bit in her teeth, and ran away. And when her father cut her off with a shilling, she never talked back, she accepted the situation. There’s character for you. There’s strength of will for you. And her son is just like her. And like his father. Big minded, strong willed, hardfisted,—oh, he’ll fight if necessary ——”

“There, there, Jenks,” and Mrs. Swift gave him a supercilious glance, “you’re talking of what you know nothing about. What are you to judge the character of your betters like that? You’re talking nonsense.”

“Not so, Mrs. Swift,—not so. I am a reader of character. I haven’t lived all these years with Mr. Winslow for nothing. Many’s the time I’ve heard him size up the character of a stranger after one interview. And always right.

And I've caught the knack, Mrs. Swift,—I've caught the knack——”

“Oh, you and your knack! You make me laugh. Get about your business, Jenks, and don't meddle with matters above your head.”

CHAPTER VI

OLD PHOTOGRAPHS

As the days went by Joyce Gilray became more and more an integral part of the Winslow household.

Mark Winslow's sharp eyes watched him and could find nothing to cavil at in the young man's attitude and behavior toward himself or any one else.

Joyce was pleasant to the servants, but dignified and impersonal in his manner. He was friendly with Burr, but the two were not intimately chummy. He was polite to Barry, but it could be noticed that these two were not congenial. A sort of veiled hostility was discerned by Winslow, and while his sympathies were entirely with his grandson, he watched carefully to see what it was that Barry resented.

It could not be the mere advent of a grandson,—Burr might resent that, but not Barry. Yet, it was clear that the lawyer did not like Joyce, and was at no pains to pretend that he did.

As a grandson, Joyce was little short of perfection.

Without fawning or silly demonstrations of affection, he showed a respect for Mark Winslow and a decided liking for his society.

Many an evening he spent at home with his grandfather, though invited to some gayer entertainment.

Mark appreciated this, and while he made no comment, it pleased him, for he greatly preferred the unspoken friendship and chumminess of his grandson to definite protestations of love.

So, Joyce and he became friends as well as relatives, and one evening as they sat alone together, Winslow broached the subject of a change of name.

"How would you look on a suggestion that you change your name?" he said, rather abruptly. Joyce looked up with a startled face.

"What do you mean, Granfer?" he said, for he had chosen to adopt the quaint diminutive, and Mark liked it.

"Good Heavens, Joyce, don't look as if I were proposing a crime! Or compounding a felony, or anything dishonorable. I only thought I should like to have the Winslow name perpetuated, and if you cared to, you could have your name legally changed to Joyce Gilray Winslow. What do you say?"

"I suppose I looked surprised because it's a novel idea to me. I've never thought of such a thing——"

"Well, think of it now, then. What do you say? It can't be a matter requiring long or deep meditation."

"No." Joyce spoke slowly. "Well, I see no real objection to it. Is it a complicated process?"

"Oh, no; though the authorities might require your baptismal certificate, and that I do not find among your mother's papers. Know anything about it?"

"Never saw it or heard of it. Never even thought of it. I'm not at all sure that I was baptized, though I suppose I must have been."

"Of course you were. Your mother was not a heathen, if she was a runaway. Well, if the papers I have of your mother's are sufficient and if you are willing, I think I'll put the matter through. You see my will as it now stands, makes my chief legatee, 'my grandchild, Joyce Gilray.' I want to change that to 'my grandson, Joyce Gilray,' but if we change your name, I'll not revamp the will until I can make it out to your new name. You see, if I should die before the change is made, it will all be yours just the same——"

"Don't, Granfer," Joyce put out a pleading

hand, "for Heaven's sake stay with me a while, now that I've found you!"

That was the sort of thing Mark Winslow liked, a desire for his company, rather than a diatribe against suggestions of death.

"Oh, I'm good for a long stretch yet," he laughed. "But soon now, my boy, I want to begin to initiate you into the details of my affairs. Not the business yet, that will all come later, but I want you to know all about my estate and my investments and my securities. It may be, after all, that I shall prefer you as my confidential assistant and secretary, instead of putting you in the business offices."

"But Burr has that post."

"I know it, but there's nothing to prevent my making a change, if I choose. You know Burr. You know he won't complain."

"No, Burr is the whitest fellow I ever saw about such things. He accepts my presence here as a matter of course, and makes no objections to anything I do."

"Why should he? He has no rights save such as I voluntarily give him. You have rights by birth,—by relationship."

Followed a short session of explanations concerning the details of Mark Winslow's moneys and properties, and Joyce listened in a respectful silence, save when he asked some pertinent and

intelligent questions regarding the subject in hand.

"Well, old chap," said Mark, as the clock chimed midnight, "it's been a pleasure to talk business to you. I don't know where you got such a quick sense of these matters, but your brain is keen and your judgment sound."

"Probably I inherited whatever talent I possess for such things from my maternal grandfather," and Joyce gave his new, frank smile, that he had already cultivated successfully.

"It may be,—it may be," and the old man rubbed his hands in satisfaction. "Now, tomorrow, boy, you make tracks for the metropolis, and lay in a store of clothing and anything else you need or want. Stay two or three days, and don't stint yourself. I'll give you a letter to my tailor and haberdasher and all that sort of thing, and you order all you like and put it on my account. They'll give you good attention, never fear."

Unmistakable gratitude and affection showed on Gilray's face.

"Dear Grandfather," he said, and there was a quiver in his voice, "you're too good to me
—"

"Nonsense! what's a few clothes more or less. And, I see, you don't care for jewelry, for which I'm thankful, but you'll want some decent cuff

links and evening studs and such things. Get whatever you choose, I trust your taste and discretion. Order yourself some stationery and, —oh, Lord, Joyce, get whatever a young man ought to have, and don't scrimp."

"So my grandfather is a Fairy Godfather as well. I'll do all you say, for I want my appearance to do you credit. But I'll be reasonably modest in my desires. You know I've not been brought up in the lap of luxury, and I'm a little out of my depths."

After settling a few more details, they separated for the night and Joyce went up to his rooms, his mind full of tailors and jewelers and an eventful trip to New York City.

Half an hour later he was again out in the hall. In dressing-gown and slippers he was softly descending the stairs. He crept down to his grandfather's library and listened a moment at the door, which stood ajar.

He glanced about the darkened hall, and then slipped into the library. Turning on one small desk lamp, he began a systematic search of the papers and letters in the pigeonholes.

Quickly he scanned many of them and as swiftly returned them to their places. At last, he came upon two letters that seemed to be what he wanted. These he studied long and earnestly. Tucking them back into place, he

picked up a small pad of blank paper, snapped off the light, and returned quietly to his room.

When Mark Winslow entered the breakfast room the next morning, Mrs. Swift approached him with a determined air.

"Mr. Winslow," she said, without preamble, "I consider it my duty to tell you of something that occurred last night."

"Tell it, then, Mrs. Swift," and Winslow looked at her, calmly, "but make it short."

"Very well, then, sir, it's only that Mr. Joyce came down stairs stealthily, after you had gone to bed, and went into your library and rummaged among your papers."

"And you spied upon him?"

"I did, sir. I considered such a strange occurrence should be reported to you, so I watched him. He was there some time, and finally came out and slyly sneaked upstairs again."

"I object to your use of the words, *slyly* and *sneaked*. But let that pass for the moment. How did you chance to be up and about yourself?"

"I never retire until the household is all in bed. I looked out of my door to make sure all lights were out, when I saw Mr. Joyce going down stairs. And I followed."

Mark Winslow looked at her. She was quite

uncertain whether he was about to address her with scathing wrath or whether he would be pleased at her conduct.

"Summon Jenks," he said.

When the butler appeared, Winslow said, "Ask Mr. Joyce to come down as soon as he is ready."

In less than two minutes, Joyce came into the room.

"Joyce, my boy, Mrs. Swift says you sneaked downstairs in the night."

"Yes, I did," was the frank reply, but the smiling face took on a puzzled look. "What about it?"

"She says, further, that you rummaged among my papers in the library."

"I did, until I found what I was after," Joyce grinned.

"And what was that?"

"A pad of blank paper. I wanted to make lists of the things I'm to buy in New York, and there was no paper in my desk except the sumptuous house stationery. It seemed a shame to use that, so I hopped down for some scribbling paper. But," his smile faded, "I object to the use of the word *sneaked*. Will Mrs. Swift say why she used that word?"

The eyes of Joyce Gilray darkened, and his jaws set themselves together, much in the

fashion of Mark Winslow's own celebrated sternness.

"I used that word, Mr. Joyce," the housekeeper began, but her voice shook and her lips trembled as she went on; "because you were so stealthy in your movements——"

"As who wouldn't be, not wishing to awake a sleeping house at one o'clock in the morning. Grandfather, I've no wish to discuss this thing with your housekeeper, but I say to you, if you've any questions to put or observations to make, concerning the matter, go ahead. For Mrs. Swift I have no explanations, no excuses; but if you question my right to go about the house at night, if you have a breath of suspicion of the truth of my explanation or a trace of doubt of my integrity and loyalty, now is the time to say so. Not one further moment would I stay in this house if you, Grandfather, can think for an instant that I went to the library for any other purpose than the one I state. Moreover, you gave me free-hand with your papers and financial matters. You kept nothing back, nothing secret. I should not dream of going secretly to look into your desk, but I must remark, that you gave me sufficient permission to do so if I wished."

"That's all true, my boy,—I know you went only for the scribbling paper, you don't have to

asseverate your statements to me. Mrs. Swift, you need not apologize, your error is too grave for that. Shall I dismiss her, Joyce?"

"Oh, no, Grandfather. Mrs. Swift doesn't know me as well as you do. Also, I think she is suspicious by nature. Let us all forget the incident and if Mrs. Swift again sees reason to doubt my integrity in any way, we can treat the matter more seriously."

The housekeeper was dismissed without a further word, which hurt her feelings far more than a stinging reprimand would have done.

"Queer," said Joyce, "that woman has had it in for me almost from the first. I don't understand her."

"Don't bother about her," said Winslow, carelessly. "If she annoys you again, she shall be summarily dismissed."

So Gilray went on his trip to New York, and expended a small fortune in accordance with his grandfather's instructions.

He enjoyed it, too, as what young man would not. He enjoyed it so much that he overstayed by four days the time he had planned to be absent.

"All right, boy," said Mark Winslow, on his return, "but staying over like that,—you should have telephoned me, or wired."

"Right you are, Granfer," Joyce's face showed

real contrition. "I'm downright sorry,—but I never thought about that. You can't put an old head on young shoulders, you know. But it sha'n't happen again,—that I promise."

He was readily forgiven, for Winslow was so glad to have him back that he speedily forgot the tardy return.

"And I say, Grandfer," Joyce went on, "I hate to ask for anything more, when you've been so good to me, but can I have a car of my own? One to drive myself, you know. Then I should have nothing left to wish for."

"Of course you can," was the hearty response. "You can choose one of the cars in the garage for your own,—or, if you prefer, you can have a brand new one."

"The new one, please,—and—a good one."

"A good one, of course," and Winslow smiled at him. "We'll go to town together to pick it out."

But if Joyce Gilray was *persona grata* with his grandfather, he was not so with his grandfather's lawyer.

Martin Barry took no pains to conceal his indifference to Joyce save when the austere presence of Mark Winslow made it politic for him to do so.

One day he chanced to be alone with Gilray in Winslow's library.

This room was study and home office as well as library, and the large apartment contained all Mark Winslow's papers and documents as well as his books.

Barry seemed to be eager to avail himself of an opportunity to speak to the young man.

"I say," he began, directly, "you lived with your mother till you were fourteen, didn't you?"

"Yes," said Joyce, sensing hostility in the lawyer's air, and quickly on the defensive.

"Then, you remember her distinctly?"

"Of course,—why?" Joyce lighted a cigarette, and looked inquiringly at the other.

"Is this her picture?" Quite suddenly the lawyer drew a picture from a small drawer in the desk and held it before Gilray's eyes.

Those eyes narrowed with indignation and resentment as their owner realized he was being tested.

But he only glanced at the picture and said, quietly, "No."

Barry looked a little discomfited, but opening another small drawer he took therefrom a packet of old photographs.

"Will you select your mother's picture from these?" he asked, with an exaggerated air of politeness.

Gilray gave a quick, steady glance at the

smiling face, and saying "Wait a minute," he left the room.

Barry heard him go swiftly upstairs and down again, and then returning to the library, Joyce closed the door behind him.

"Look here, Mr. Barry," he said, in a stern, even tone, "your questions are not unfair, but I resent your attitude. You seem suspicious of something—I don't know what. But I won't have it. If you have any doubts of my identity, or my good faith in any way, come out into the open like a man and put them into words. I deny your right to ask covert questions, to try, apparently, to trip me up,—to set traps for me. I won't stand it, and I demand an explanation.

"But first, as to this photograph business. What possible reason could you have for asking me to pick out my mother's picture, except to see if I can do it? Now, I admit that I might be wrong. These are all pictures of a bygone day, and if my mother's picture is among them it may well be of her as a very young girl, and in an old fashioned costume, and therefore so different from my own recollections of my mother, that as, I say, I might well make a mistake. Yet I am willing to try,—but first, I will show you this picture that I went upstairs to get. This is my mother as I knew her best. Taken less than two years before she died, and inscribed, as you

see, on the back, 'To Joyce, with a merry Christmas.' My grandfather will tell you that that is my mother's writing,—since you seem to doubt my veracity."

Gilray's eyes were stormy now, and his jaws were set, after the manner of the Winslow jaws.

Barry looked crestfallen, and endeavored to turn off the matter lightly.

"Oh, don't be so serious. My photograph game was merely a joke——"

"A very poor joke, and of a sort that I advise you not to try again."

Gilray spoke sternly and with the air of a master reprimanding a fractious pupil.

Barry writhed under this tone, but dared not show resentment, for he knew Gilray was under Winslow's protection and so had the whip hand.

"I'm not through yet," Joyce went on, for he heard Mark Winslow's step in the hall, and determined to put the annoying Barry in his place.

"Come in, Grandfather," he said, rising and flinging open the library door. "What do you think Mr. Barry is up to now? Trying to trip me up by making me guess which of a lot of photographs is my mother's picture!"

"Where did you get the pictures, Barry?"

and Mark Winslow's voice was ominously cool and calm.

"From your desk drawer," said Barry, striving to speak gaily. "I only meant to have a bit of sport with Joyce here——"

"Mr. Gilray, if you please," and Joyce turned on him. "I've never asked you to use my Christian name, that I remember."

"Let me get the straight of this photograph story," persisted Winslow. "I want to know just what happened."

In a few words Joyce told him exactly what had happened, and he nodded.

"Barry, you have before this hinted some vague doubts of my grandson's identity. Have you any real reasons for doubt?"

"No, I haven't," Barry said, "I only felt that in a matter of such grave importance we couldn't be too careful to prevent imposture——"

"Imposture!" Winslow fairly shouted at him. "That settles it! Martin Barry you get out of that door, and don't you ever enter it again! I'll send your successor to you to get all necessary information and details of my affairs in which you are involved. Now, go!"

Mark Winslow's jaws came together with a mighty snap, and few men would have dared a word of excuse or self-defence to the towering figure fairly shaking with rage.

At any rate Martin Barry braved no such wrath, and without a word he picked up his hat and stalked out with an air of bravado that was palpably assumed.

"Well, Grandfather,——" Joyce began, but Winslow interrupted.

"Hold on," he said, still glowering, "what's that picture of your mother you have there? Why haven't you shown it to me before?"

Joyce Gilray threw back his head, and almost spoke angrily in return for the other's sharp tones.

Then, thinking better of it, his voice sank to a tender note, as he said, "I didn't show it to you, Grandfather, because I feared it might sadden you. It shows mother as she was near the last, —after she grew faded, and ill,—old before her time. Here it is, and you can see for yourself what I mean. I retained it, thinking to show it to you some day, unless my judgment bid me refrain."

He passed over the picture and Mark Winslow's eyes filled as he gazed at it.

"You were right, Joyce," he said in a quivering voice. "Poor dear little Helen. And she came to look like that,—at only thirty-four! Poor, dear little girl."

And Joyce Gilray stole softly from the room, lest he disturb the reverie into which the old man sank.

It was about a week later, when a strange thing occurred to shake the Winslow household out of the pleasant calm into which they were drifting.

Barry was out of the way, Mrs. Swift was lamb-like in her demeanor and Burr and Gilray were fast becoming very good friends.

Joyce was rapidly becoming a society favorite, his good looks, good dancing and gay spirits charming the girls and pleasing their mothers in the social set of Willowvale.

Early in the morning, Jenks, as usual, opened doors and windows and got the house ready for the day.

On the verandah, just outside the library windows, he saw a huddled form lying very still.

Going nearer, to his unbounded astonishment, he discovered it was a young woman, rather gaily dressed in sport clothes, and of a type not often seen around Mark Winslow's home.

A very brief examination proved to Jenks' horror that the woman was dead, and what to do then even the resourceful Jenks did not know.

He was tempted to call some help and have the body carried away before Mr. Winslow could know of it. For Jenks had made it his life work to spare his employer all distress or annoyance possible.

But he felt sure this was not the right thing to

do, and he knew in his heart that Mark Winslow must be told.

A fleeting impulse was to call Mr. Joyce first, and so save Winslow a shock. But Jenks knew his master too well, to seem to set any one over or ahead of him in authority, and with a sinking heart, he called the second man to guard the body while he went to tell Mr. Winslow.

“Lord save us!” cried the other servant, “who is she?”

“I haven’t a notion,” returned Jenks, “have you?”

“Massy, no! She looks a trollop,—that’s all I have to say.”

“You’ve nothing to say,” admonished Jenks, severely. “You stay right there and keep watch and if the maids come out here send them about their business. At any rate, don’t let anybody touch her.”

“Touch her!” exclaimed the other, rolling his eyes upward, as if to touch the stranger would be the last thing he should think of.

So Jenks went upstairs.

CHAPTER VII

A TRAGEDY

“FOR Heaven’s sake, Jenks, try to control yourself!” Mark Winslow spoke sharply to the man in his doorway. “*Who* is downstairs on the verandah?”

The butler still shook nervously, but managed to ejaculate, “a—a woman, sir,—a young woman——”

“What is she? An agent? A beggar?”

“She’s—she’s dead, sir——”

“What!” and Winslow jumped out of bed and began to hurry into his clothes. “What do you mean—dead?”

“Just that, sir.” Jenks found it easier now that the ice was broken. “A young woman, lying on the porch,—the East porch,—and stone dead!”

“Impossible? Incredible! But don’t tell me any more,—I’ll be down there in a minute. Go and tell Mr. Joyce, I shall want his help—if this thing is true—is it, Jenks?”

“Yes, sir,—so help me, God,——”

“Never mind calling on Providence to help,—

go and rout out Mr. Joyce and tell him to hustle."

Winslow dressed completely, but with sure, swift motions that sent him downstairs inside of five minutes.

Joyce made no response to the butler's light knock, so Jenks stepped into his room and woke him with a slight shake.

"What's the matter?" Gilray cried, alert at once.

"There's a woman dead down on the porch—she—she—" Jenks became incoherent again.

"A what?" Joyce stared at him.

"A woman, sir,—a dead woman—Mr. Winslow has gone down, and he wants you——"

"I should think he did! Get out, Jenks,—I'll be down in two shakes—hold on, who is she? Do you know?"

"No, sir,—never saw her before,—she's—she's not a lady, sir."

Joyce made record speed and hurrying down stairs, found Winslow bending over the body with an air of bewilderment.

"Most extraordinary, Joyce," he said, "see, the poor thing has been stabbed in the throat. Some ruffian—but, why, in the name of goodness on my porch?"

"Good Lord, how awful!" Joyce exclaimed, as his grandfather stood upright, and he got a clearer

view of the terrible scene. "And what quantities of blood—oh, the poor girl! Who is she?"

"Nobody knows,—I mean none of our people——"

"What's to be done? What can I do to help?"

Joyce spoke briskly, anxious to save his grandfather all possible responsibility, and ready to take the helm if desired.

"I don't know," Winslow said, uncertainly. "I've heard one must not touch a dead body until the coroner arrives——"

"Lord, who'd want to touch it——"

"Well, I'd rather remove it into the house than have it out here where any one can see it——"

"No, Grandfather, don't take it in the house. Let's send for the coroner at once and he'll take it away somewhere. I suppose however it happened, it's merely an accident that it occurred here. The girl must have been walking by, and was attacked by some brute, and ran in here for shelter,—and he followed,—and killed her. That's the way it looks, but there may be some different explanation. That isn't our business, though. I say, Granfer, I think first of all you ought to call a doctor."

"But the poor thing is dead, Joyce."

"I know, but—well, my only knowledge of

these things is based on murder stories I've read, and they always call a doctor first."

"It's a good idea," Winslow agreed, "and anyway, Doctor Murray will know what to do. Call him, Jenks,—call Doctor Murray, and tell him to come over at once. Don't tell him why, unless you have to. Just tell him it's a serious matter. He'll come. And then call Mr. Burr Winslow. I depend a lot on Burr's judgment and wisdom."

If Gilray resented this, he did not show it, and turning to Winslow, he said, "Come along to breakfast, Granfer. Mrs. Swift will hurry it up a bit, I'm sure, and you'd better have your coffee to brace you up for what may be a trying day."

"Oh, I can't eat, Joyce——"

"You can try, and you must. The servants will do all that's necessary in the way of guarding the—the body, and when Doctor Murray comes he will shoulder the responsibility and know just what to do. Come along."

The two went to the breakfast room, and Joyce, with his quick tact introduced some other subjects, and so diverted Winslow's mind from the tragedy that the old man managed to make a good breakfast.

Doctor Murray came, and after an examination of the dead woman's body, he joined the

others at the table and asked for a cup of coffee for himself.

"It's a most unfortunate thing, Winslow," he said, "that she should have died on your estate. It's bound to make unpleasant publicity if nothing else. But I've called the Medical Examiner, Tenney, and he'll bring some men from Headquarters,—oh, yes, you can't escape all that sort of thing."

For Mark Winslow had turned an imploring face to the doctor, as if begging off from such unpleasantness.

"As I see it," Joyce said, "we are in for a regular inquest and all that. I hope, Doctor Murray, that I can meet the Examiner and his aids and take the brunt of the trouble off of my grandfather's shoulders."

"You can do a lot, Gilray," said the doctor, who knew and liked Joyce. "But of course they will question you, too, Winslow. However, it'll be just red tape, and while it's mighty unpleasant, it's all impersonal. I mean it isn't as if any of your family or people were implicated."

"That's just it, Murray." Winslow's voice was low. "Of course not my family, but how do I know that none of my servants is implicated?"

"Well, that's as may be. But I fancy she came in from outside, and it merely chanced, that it was this house she came to. I don't

think she belongs in Willowvale,—I never saw her before.”

“She’s a good looking piece,” Mark observed, in an impersonal tone.

“Yes,” said the doctor, “but ordinary. Flashy clothes, tawdry jewelry, and dyed hair. Lots of make-up on her face,—and yet, she must have been pretty, in a cheap way.”

“Where do you suppose she came from?” asked Joyce, wonderingly.

“There’s no telling. And that’s outside my province. Tenney is a clever chap, he finds clues,—if there are any to find. I haven’t seen any myself.”

“Footprints? Fingerprints?” asked Gilray. “You see, I’ve read lots of detective stories, and they depend a lot on prints.”

“Yes,” said Doctor Murray, dryly, “in the stories the criminals obligingly leave prints for the astute detective to find. But prints,—legible ones, are rare in real life.”

And then the authorities came, and the trio rose from the table and went out to meet them.

“Bad business,” said Doctor Tenney, bending over the tragic figure. “Stabbed with a——”

“With a long, wide-bladed dagger,” Doctor Murray interrupted, anxious to be of importance.

“Knife,” corrected Doctor Tenney, “knife, not dagger. For you see the cut where it entered

is wider at one end than the other. A dagger incision would be pointed at both ends."

Gilray turned aside,—this discussion of the sickening details was almost too much for him. He wanted to stand by and help Winslow, but he shrank from the actualities of the murder.

"An awful jab," went on Tenney, almost, it seemed to Joyce, with a relish, "she must have died instantly, before she could utter a scream."

"You don't think then," said Murray, "that she was killed elsewhere and brought here afterward?"

"Not a chance of it. There would have been a trail of blood, and other marks in the dust. No, she fell just where she lies now,—you see there's no sign of a struggle,—nor did she stand around here long. There are almost no tracks in the dust of the porch,—in fact there's almost no dust. What do you make of it all, Fuller?"

The police detective, Guy Fuller, hadn't said much as yet, but on being thus appealed to, he spoke at some length.

"I quite agree with all you've said, Doctor Tenney," he declared. "And I'm sure this woman does not belong in Willowvale. I'm pretty well acquainted here, and she's such a conspicuous figure, I'm sure I should have seen her around town if she had lived here. Now, she may have drifted in from anywhere, and by

any means. All that is pure speculation,—I mean, whether she came in a motor car, on the train, or was walking. I see no helpful footprints,—except,—yes, by Jove, there are some!”

The young man ran down the few verandah steps and along the lawn.

“See,” he cried, “in the smooth grass, you can faintly discern footprints, though I’m quite ready to admit they may have nothing to do with the matter in hand.”

The other men followed him, and looked intently at the faint depressions in the grass, which he pointed out.

“As I read them,” Fuller went on, more as if thinking aloud than talking to others, “here are two sets of prints, side by side,—don’t tread on them, Doctor Murray! They are indistinct, and incomplete, yet it looks as if the woman and a man came in from the street, and crossed this lawn to the porch. Then, you see here is another set of the man’s footprints,——”

“I can’t see them,” said Joyce, who was intently listening and looking, “where are they?”

“They are almost indiscernible,” admitted the young detective, “but I am sure they are there. See, here’s a fairly clear impression——”

“Well, they’re certainly not clear enough to base any conclusions on,” said Doctor Murray, a little contemptuously.

"If we get the conclusion that a man brought the woman here, that's a lot," said Doctor Tenney, with a glance at Mark Winslow.

"You bet it is!" agreed the old man. "Why that would let out my servants——"

"Not necessarily. A servant of yours could have gone out, and come back with the girl, thus making the two sets of tracks, outgoing and incoming."

Some minutes before, Burr Winslow had joined the group, but save for a word of greeting to Mark and Gilray, had said nothing. Now he spoke.

"Those prints are pretty faint, Mr. Fuller, but they are there, and must have been made, I should say, by a man walking beside a woman. Though indefinite in outline, the size proves that. Now, here you can notice, the outgoing footprint is over the incoming one. Doesn't that prove the man came in and then went out?"

"Yes," agreed the detective, none too well pleased to have an outsider score a point. "But that doesn't let out Mr. Winslow's servants entirely, for a man could come in with the woman go out again alone, and then return to the house by some other way—or path."

"And pray why should you suspect my servants?" asked Winslow, his voice calm and steady, but with stormy eyes.

"I don't," said Fuller, promptly, "but it is my duty to investigate the entire household of a man on whose premises a dead body is found, and I propose to do so."

Winslow's attitude changed suddenly.

"Of course," he said, urbanely. "That is only right. The place is entirely at your disposal. May I ask you to do it up as quickly as you can?"

"We will, Mr. Winslow, but it is not a small job. The law must take its course, and as we all know, that course is sometimes long and tedious. Now, Darrow," he spoke to one of the attendant policemen, "you set a guard over those footprints. They may not mean a thing or they may be a valuable clue. Now let's see what we can learn from the body itself, and then it can be taken away. Mr. Winslow, you need not attend these harrowing scenes——"

"I'm not fond of harrowing scenes," Mark Winslow returned, with a grim smile, "but I propose to know all about the tragedy that has taken place on my premises, so be prepared to have me dog your footsteps, Mr. Detective, all day long,—if you are here all day."

"I'm afraid I shall be," was the rueful reply, "but I'm glad to have you by me, Mr. Winslow. You may be of great help."

Burr and Joyce stood by also, saying little,

but watching the proceedings with deep interest.

"It's pretty awful," Burr said to Gilray, "but since it's a complete stranger, we can take an impersonal interest. And we must know all there is to be known, in case we have any opportunity to help Uncle Mark."

Joyce nodded agreement to this, and the two young men looked on, silently.

Carefully Fuller examined the girl's clothing and accessories.

On the floor near her lay a gaudy handbag of red leather, with large, colored stones set in its clasps.

From this Fuller hoped for a clue, but the contents proved to be only the ordinary list.

Two handkerchiefs, a pair of gloves, various toilet implements and make-up preparations, a pencil, a purse with about forty dollars in bills and change, a crumpled veil and the stub of a parlor car ticket,—that was all. No card or letter that might divulge her name, and no bunch of keys or anything to indicate her identity.

"Keys and letters abstracted by the murderer," said Fuller, sagely nodding his head. "Smart chap, too. No finger prints, no clue to the girl's name, and I'm prepared to declare, no possible connection with any body in this house, for I'm sure such a clever criminal just

left his victim here because there was no connection with the Winslow place."

"Good work," the Medical Examiner said, approvingly. "You're dead right, Fuller, and though we shall have to search your house, Mr. Winslow, and interview your servants, it will be largely a perfunctory examination for I, too, am sure there is no connection between this brutal murder and the Winslow house."

"Well, then," said Mark, greatly relieved at these speeches, "suppose you do up me and my grandson first, and then we can be excused while you put the servants through."

"Very well," agreed Doctor Tenney, "we'll do it right here and now. Mr. Winslow, what do you know of this affair?"

"Absolutely nothing. I was awakened this morning about seven, by my butler, who told me of his discovery."

"You heard no disturbance during the night?"

"Not a sound, out of the ordinary. Only the noise of passing motors and the striking of my clocks."

"No sound of a struggle, or even of a confab on your own verandah?"

"Not a hint of anything of the sort."

"And you never saw this young woman before?"

"Never, to my knowledge."

"You've no idea who she is?"

"Not the slightest."

"And you've no reason to suspect any of your servants of being mixed up in any intrigue or any love affair that might lead to this tragedy?"

"Absolutely none."

"Then I think I've nothing more to ask you now. I may wish a talk later. Mr. Gilray, did you hear anything during the night that you can connect with this matter?"

"Nothing at all," declared Joyce, positively.

"You heard nobody approach the house, no voices on the porch, no struggle or scream?"

"No, nothing," was the answer, "but I always sleep very soundly."

"You know of nothing that might make you think any of the house servants are implicated?"

"Nothing at all."

"And you heard of the tragedy,—how?"

"The butler, Jenks, came and informed me, just after he had told my grandfather. I dressed quickly and hurried downstairs, to find Mr. Winslow already on the scene."

"That will do for you two gentlemen. It's clear you know nothing about it at all. Now I'll talk to the servants. But first, I'll go over the body once more, and then I think we may have it taken away. There'll have to be an autopsy, but the immediate cause of death is

clear. There's no weapon about, but of course the criminal took that away with him. We may conclude the weapon was a long, wide and fairly thick knife blade——”

“Like a carving knife?” asked Gilray, looking at the Examiner.

“No,—more like a large Jack-knife, or a big pocket knife, such as sailors or woodsmen carry.”

“I've never seen that sort,” Joyce said. “How do you know about it?”

“Because the incision shows the shape of the blade, and the line of the wound tells its story too. Now, I think, Fuller, any further examination of the body can be made at the morgue, where we shall send it.

“I know Mr. Winslow will be glad to be rid of the gruesome exhibit, and we can have it photographed later, with a view to learning the identity of the victim.”

Burr Winslow shuddered at the casual way these men spoke of the dreadful details, and he was fascinated against his will at the sight of the men lifting the body for removal.

Though they were careful, they showed little reverence for the dead, and Burr noticed that they were more interested in watching out for a possible clue than in their gentle handling of the limp body.

The Fourteenth Key

Like the others he looked out for a clue, but none was apparent.

They took away the victim, the undertaker's wagon having arrived for the purpose, and the detective went to see the Winslow servants as the Medical Examiner rode away with the body.

"Let's go along, Joyce," Burr said, for now that the chief figure in the tragedy had been removed, he felt the lure of the hunt.

The two young men followed Fuller and listened to his quizzing of the corps of Winslow servants.

But no real information was gained. The women servants were more or less hysterical, the men were stolid and straightforward in their denials of any knowledge of the matter.

All gave good account of their whereabouts the night before.

The doctors had agreed that the woman was killed at or about two o'clock in the morning, and all the servants swore to having been in their beds at that hour.

Jenks, always the last one to go to bed, corroborated their statements, and declared that he himself went to his room at twelve o'clock, as the family had retired by that time, and the house was still.

Put through a strong fire of questions, Jenks'

answers were so straightforward and so convincing, that Fuller was unable to suspect him of any knowledge of or implication in the deed.

There remained only Mrs. Swift, who had been left to the last, and who had not as yet shown herself at all.

She came when summoned, and her eyes were red with weeping.

"Did you know the dead woman?" Fuller flung at her, without preamble.

"No," she said, weeping afresh into her handkerchief.

"Then why are you so affected?"

"As if it isn't enough to affect a body, to have a poor young thing killed on our very doorstep!"

"Did you hear any unexplained noise in the night?"

"That I did! My room is right above that porch,—in the third story——"

"What could you hear from the third story?"

Fuller did not believe in this witness. He had met hysterical women before, and he knew the type that loves notoriety and is willing to do or say anything to get into the limelight. He had known women to make up astonishing yarns merely to surprise and mystify the police, and experience made him believe Mrs. Swift was of that sort.

He impatiently awaited her reply, for if she

became diffuse he meant to cut her story short.

"I heard voices," Mrs. Swift began, and the way she rolled her eyes about, looking for interested auditors, confirmed Fuller's thoughts.

But he listened patiently, and she went on.

"Two voices,—a man's and a woman's."

"Could you hear what they said?" Fuller hoped to trap her.

"No,—except I could hear that they were angry. Apparently the man was threatening her, and when she refused to do what he asked——"

"What did he ask?" Fuller shot out the question suddenly.

"I couldn't hear what he asked," Mrs. Swift looked aggrieved, "but I'm sure he threatened her——"

"And then she still refused, and he stabbed her in his sudden rage?"

"Yes," and Mrs. Swift nodded affirmatively.

"Then what did the man do?"

"Went away across the lawn——"

"You saw him?"

"I—I think I did——"

"Well, I think you didn't. Mrs. Swift, you've not been out with us at the scene of the tragedy, —who told you all about it?"

"Susan, one of the maids."

"Exactly. And having heard all about the

three sets of footprints, the way the woman was killed, and the apparent possibilities, you have reconstructed the crime along the most obvious lines and you are playing to the grand stand! Don't deny it,—I know that is so. Now, stick to the truth,—on your oath,—how much of what you've described did you really see?"

The Winslow housekeeper sulked. Joyce Gilray looked at her in surprise. He didn't like Mrs. Swift, especially of late, but he didn't understand her.

After a moment's hesitation, she said, angrily, "None of it."

CHAPTER VIII

TOWN GOSSIP

"I THOUGHT so," and the detective laughed. "I've heard witnesses of your stamp before, Mrs. Swift. You drew on your imagination for the sake of creating a bit of excitement. Nothing more now, from you, but I may want to see you again later. Jenks, was everything properly locked this morning,—just as you left it last night?"

"Everything, sir," said the butler, positively. "Not a door or window unfastened, and not a thing out of place."

"I cannot feel," said Fuller, thoughtfully, "that the crime is in any way connected with the inmates of this house,—yet there is always the possibility that somebody from the house came out and went in again, without disturbing anything. Therefore, though it is merely a formality, I feel it necessary to search the house."

No objection was made by any one, and several men under Fuller's direction, searched

all the rooms of the Winslow mansion, from those of the master himself, to those of the lowest servants.

They reported absolutely nothing suspicious or incriminating in any room, and Fuller drew a breath of relief, for he had no wish to consider Mark Winslow or his household in any way concerned in the crime.

"They were both strangers to the town," he declared, "the victim and her murderer. Doubtless they were going through in a motor car, and he chose this place as quiet and well back from the road, for the scene of his dastardly attack on his companion. Mrs. Swift's story of seeing and hearing a man and a woman may or may not be true. But in either case it is of no evidential value. It was a dark night, she couldn't have seen them clearly, and she didn't recognize them. Myself, I doubt if we ever solve the mystery. The murderer is of course, miles away by this time, and we have no clue of any sort by which to trace him."

"But you will make some effort, won't you?" asked Burr Winslow, surprised at the detective's indifferent manner.

"Of course, the story will be in the papers, and photographs of the woman. If any friends recognize her, they will make it known. Yes, we'll advertise it thoroughly, but as to active

effort on our part, you must see for yourself. there's small opportunity for that. We can't seek a man of whose appearance we know nothing——”

“It needn't have been a man——” suggested Gilray.

Fuller stared at him. “That's true,” he said, “it could have been another woman,—but it seems improbable. And there are a man's footprints on the grass.”

“If you can call them footprints,” Joyce smiled. “They are merely dragging depressions, formless and of no definite size.”

“They may seem so to you,” and Fuller took on a superior air, “but to us who are accustomed to valuing such prints, it is easy to read their story. I am positive the larger impressions in the grass were made by a man's feet. That he walked in across the lawn with the woman by his side and that he later walked out again alone. To you laymen, the prints may seem confused and indistinct, but to us, they are legible enough to make those conclusions positive.”

“Are there tracks of a motor car?” Joyce asked.

“That we can't say,” Fuller returned, “there are, of course, plenty of tracks along the road, but as the car,—if the pair were in a car,—didn't drive in, we can't judge anything from

the tire prints. And, too, there may have been others in the party. Another man or more, may have waited outside in the car, while the two came in. That is unlikely, however, for a murderer,—and this is clearly, a premeditated murder,—does not, as a rule, have others with him. No, the whole case is clear enough to me; as I see it, the man wanted to put the woman out of his way. He took her for a midnight drive,—or, possibly walk,—and somehow lured her into the seclusion of Mr. Winslow's porch, and stabbed her. The blow was swift and sure, and she doubtless died instantaneously and without a sound. Now, if a fortunate chance throws in our way any information from neighboring towns of a suspicious car or motorist we may have something to work on; but I fear such a clever, cool-headed villain as this one appears to be, will get himself safely away from the vicinity of his crime."

"Strange there was no hint of her indentivity among her personal effects," Burr Winslow said, thoughtfully.

"That was part of the clever villain's foresight." Fuller declared. "He doubtless took from her purse any letters, cards or keys that might disclose her address, and she was not of the type that has embroidered initials on her clothing."

"No clue in the way of tailor's labels, or that?" asked Gilray.

"None that we have found as yet. Her clothes are of the cheap, ready-made variety,—flashy sport clothes, and cheap undergarments. No, so far, there's not a personal clue of any sort."

"What about the Pullman ticket stub?" Burr said suddenly.

"No good," said Fuller. "It's two months old, and on a distant railroad. It was stuffed in a side pocket of her bag, and worn and torn as if it had been there unnoticed for a long time. Well, I'll be going on now, and if anything new turns up I'll let you know at once. In the meantime, try to forget it all. It is a most unfortunate occurrence, but not one, I hope, that will cause you any further inconvenience or annoyance."

The detective collected his men and went away, satisfied that he could do nothing further in the matter, and not caring much. To him the case had few points of interest. A sordid murder of and by low class, ordinary people. He only regretted that the aristocratic Mark Winslow had to be dragged into it at all.

"She wasn't a bad looking girl," said Burr to Gilray, after the police had gone.

"Rather pretty, in a cheap way," Joyce agreed.

“That crinkly reddish hair always accompanies a clear, fair skin. But she was about the limit for loud, tawdry apparel.”

“Yes, that big-check sport suit and those gewgaw beads round her neck looked like Long-acre Square at its worst. Poor thing—probably up from New York on a joy ride,—that turned out to be anything but joyful. I doubt if they ever know a bit more about her than they do this minute.”

“I doubt it too,” agreed Joyce, and then Burr went off home and Gilray went up to his own rooms.

In a few moments, Mrs. Swift came, knocking at his door.

He admitted her, and, deliberately closing the door behind herself, she calmly took a chair and faced Joyce with an air of bravado.

“I’ve come to talk to you,” she said.

“So I gathered,” he returned, pleasantly.

“What about?”

“About the murder of that poor girl.”

“Yes?”

“Yes. You see, I saw you and recognized you——”

“When and where?” he asked, curiously, as she paused.

“Last night,—walking across the lawn——”

“Me! Walking across the lawn last night——”

he stared at her with a bewildered expression but with a dawning fire in his eyes.

"Yes,—about two o'clock, the hour the girl was killed."

"Let's get this thing straight," Joyce's tone was icy, "you saw me, Mrs. Swift?"

She trembled a little under his gaze, and picked nervously at her handkerchief.

"Yes, Mr. Joyce,—I'm sure it was you—but if you will make it worth my while, nobody need ever know——"

"Stop right there, Mrs. Swift," Joyce rose.

He took her firmly by the arm, and as she stood up, he led her from the room and down the broad staircase.

He spoke no word, but his grip on her arm made it impossible for her to do other than walk by his side.

He took her straight to Mark Winslow's library, and throwing open the door, led her inside.

"Grandfather," he said, "I wish you, please, to listen to what Mrs. Swift has to say. It savors of blackmail,—but you can judge of that. Now Mrs. Swift, repeat what you said to me upstairs."

"I—I—didn't mean it—I—" the woman was sobbing now.

"That won't do," said Joyce, inexorably.

“Repeat to my grandfather what you said to me.”

Mark Winslow, interested now, looked sternly at his housekeeper and waited.

The compelling gaze of Gilray had its effect, and Mrs. Swift tried to control her voice; “I only said—I thought I saw—”

“You did not say that,” Joyce thundered at her. “What did you say?”

“Then,—I said, I saw somebody that I thought——”

“Stop that quibbling,” Joyce took a step toward her. “You said you saw—whom?”

“You,” she whispered, cowed by his severity.

“Where?”

“Crossing the lawn——”

“When?” Joyce shot out the words like bullets.

“Last—night——”

“That’s it, Grandfather, Mrs. Swift declares she saw me cross our lawn about two o’clock last night,—but, if I’ll make it worth her while, she won’t tell any one.”

Mark Winslow turned to Gilray.

“Where were you last night at two o’clock?”

“In bed and asleep.” The clear young eyes met the older ones with a frank straightforward gaze.

“Are you aware, Mrs. Swift,” Winslow turned

to his housekeeper,—“that blackmail is a crime, and punishable as such?”

“But I—thought I saw him—I did see him——” the wretched woman burst into hysterical tears.

“You neither saw him nor thought you saw him,” Winslow declared, in low, grave tones. “Mr. Joyce was in bed and asleep. You have made up this story, hoping that he might pay you money, in order to avert suspicion from himself. He is in no danger of suspicion, but you are in serious danger of arrest and imprisonment.”

“Oh, Mr. Winslow, forgive me—I didn’t mean any harm——”

“Nonsense! Harm is just what you did mean. But don’t ask my forgiveness. It is my grandson to whom you must apologize. If he chooses to forgive you, that is his affair. If he refuses to forgive you, and wants you prosecuted, I will make that my affair. What do you say, Joyce?”

“Oh, no, Granfer,” Gilray looked pained, “I don’t want to prosecute Mrs. Swift. I do demand an apology, and assurance that it shall not happen again. That will entirely satisfy me.”

“But it won’t satisfy me,” declared Winslow. “Mrs. Swift, you will first apologize to my grandson.”

“I do,” said the woman, “fully and deeply. Please forgive me, Mr. Joyce,——”

“You will retract your statements,” said Joyce, looking at her pointedly.

“I do. I did not see you,——”

“Nor any one you thought was myself?”

“No, sir. If I saw any one,—it must have been a stranger.”

“Did you see any one, Mrs. Swift?” Winslow put in.

“I’m not sure, sir. It was a very dark night, and I thought I saw a person, but it might have been the shadows of the waving branches.”

“What were you doing up at that time of night?” Winslow asked, curiously.

“I’m a very poor sleeper, Mr. Winslow, and I often get up and sit by my window hours at a time.”

“Then you state that you did not see me,” Joyce went on, “and that you pretended you did, in order to get hush money from me?”

Though strongly disinclined to reply, the compelling eyes made her respond and a scarce breathed “yes,” was the answer.

“You hear, Grandfather,” and Joyce said no more.

“Yes,” Winslow said. “And you need not apologize further, Mrs. Swift, for my grandson is not to be bothered with your worthless regrets.

You will, of course, leave my employ at once. I will give you extra payment instead of longer notice, but please go away without seeing me again. I bid you good morning."

"Good morning, sir," and the distressed woman hurried from the room.

"It's too bad, Joyce, that you should be bothered with such a disgraceful scene, and you did just right to bring her at once to me. I have felt for some time that she was not a woman I wanted any longer around the house. She has been here many years, but she has outgrown her usefulness and has become arrogant and overbearing. I can't tell you, my boy, how I appreciate your frankness and loyalty in all our dealings with one another. I love and trust you fully, and after another month or so of leisure for you, I want to take you on as my confidential secretary, so that you will be familiar with all my business concerns and all my private affairs as well."

"Whenever you say the word, Granfer," and Joyce smiled at him. "I'm having a jolly good time, and I'm glad of a few weeks longer of idleness, and then I want to buckle down to real business. And, I say, Granfer, I'd like a room or so of my own in New York. As winter comes on, there'll be lots doing there socially, and I don't fancy trailing out here late at night."

"All right, Joyce, I understand. You pick out a nice little suite in some good bachelor hotel, and tell me about it. I fancy it can be arranged. Now about that horrible affair of last night, let's try to forget it. Don't mention it to me, unless it should become absolutely necessary. If the police turn up here again, you see them, and get rid of them. Will you, Joyce,—will you do that for me?"

"You bet I will, Granfer. I'll settle Fuller, if he comes again. But I doubt if he will. They're through with us."

"I hope so, I'm sure. Good Lord, here comes Molly!"

And sure enough, the next moment, Molly Winslow walked in unannounced.

"You get out, Joyce," she ordered, after greetings were exchanged, "I want to see my uncle alone."

At a nod from Winslow, Gilray left the room, and Molly broke forth at once.

"What's all this about a murder committed over here?" she exclaimed.

"Molly," said Winslow, "I've just asked Joyce not to refer to that unpleasant matter in my presence. I beg the same of you. I don't want to hear about it, think about it, or talk about it. Will you be good enough to change the subject?"

"That I will not. Why don't you want to discuss it?"

"Because it is too distressing. Have you no feelings, no nerves, that you choose to talk on such gruesome subjects unnecessarily?"

"And you want it all hushed up?"

"I certainly do."

"Without any effort to find the murderer?"

"Without any such effort on my part."

"Why, Mark Winslow! Then you make yourself an accessory after the fact——"

Winslow laughed aloud. "Don't be silly, Molly! You don't know what you're talking about."

"Yes, I do! It's compounding a felony—or something like that. Anyway, Mark, if you're so keen to hush up the whole affair, you make me think you're implicated——"

"Hold on there, Molly," he laughed shortly; "we've had one blackmailing case in here this morning, I don't want another!"

"What do you mean?"

Winslow told her of Mrs. Swift's attack upon Joyce, and to his surprise Molly seemed deeply interested.

"So she thinks so too," she exclaimed. "You may as well know, Mark, the whole town is talking about you and Joyce."

“About me and Joyce? In connection with this murder?”

“Yes; oh, it’s only gossip, but they do say that it may be that you or Joyce or both of you know more about it than you have told.”

“H’m, Molly, just who is saying this?”

A little scared by the gleam of anger in his eye, Molly Winslow hesitated a moment then went on:

“Well, I heard it from Mrs. Plum——”

“I’ll warrant you did! Mrs. Plum, a busy-body, a town gossip! Well, then, what does Mrs. Plum say?”

“Why, that’s all she says,—that you may know more than you told——”

“Why should I know more than I tell? What does old mother Plum mean by that?”

“She isn’t so old,” Molly tried to laugh the matter off.

“I don’t care how old she is, you answer my question. Why should I know more than I tell?”

“I don’t know!” snapped Molly. “I didn’t say you did! What do I care if you know all about it——”

“Hush that sort of talk, Molly,” Winslow was grave now. “What you have said may be a serious matter, or it may be mere nonsense. But I must know which. Is Mrs. Plum making

trouble for me purposely or is she merely babbling idly?"

"Oh, that I guess," Molly made haste to reply. "Mere idle chatter. After a shock like that murder the town is bound to be full of gossip. And what more natural than to mention your name—especially," Molly looked at him shrewdly, "especially when you are so anxious to hush the matter up without further investigation."

"Who says I want to hush it up? I don't! Well, maybe I did,—but since you've come and made these remarks, these insinuations and implications, I've changed my mind. I'm on the warpath now. I'll show them whether I'm to be quoted as 'wanting to hush the matter up'!"

He went to the door and stepped out into the hall.

"Joyce!" he called in a tone that might have reached the roof.

"Hullo," came the response, and Gilray came down stairs two steps at a time. "What's to pay?"

"The devil!" replied Winslow. "Your precious cousin Molly here, says we are suspected of this murder business——"

"Oh, Mark, I didn't say any such thing!" Molly protested.

“Whew!” exclaimed Gilray; “The women are all after us this morning! Well, Granfer, what did you tell Cousin Molly?”

“I haven’t told her anything. I scorn to answer her innuendoes. But I mean to take steps——”

“Go ahead, Granfer, take the steps. What are they? I’ll take them with you.”

“Of course you will, boy. We’ll show ’em that the Winslow men are not to be gossipped about,—not to be accused of implication in murder——”

“Oh, come now, Granfer, it isn’t as bad as that, is it?”

“That’s what it amounts to,” declared the old man, ignoring Molly’s frantic denials. “So, we’ll fight fire with fire. That fool Swift woman we could shut up and dismiss, but the townsfolk have begun to chatter, and that means drastic measures. Good Lord, to think because a murder is committed on a man’s verandah, to think he must himself be the murderer! But it’s all because those dunderheaded policemen don’t know which way to look,—haven’t a bit of talent for detective work in their whole force. Can’t think of anything better to say than, “Crime on Mark Winslow’s verandah. Therefore, Mark Winslow is the criminal.”

“Or his grandson,” put in Joyce, smiling.

"Yes,—or his grandson! Well, grandson, we'll fix 'em. We'll find the real murderer, and make the confounded arms of the law eat their own words!"

"How are you going about it?" asked Molly, with real interest. Though always at odds with her Uncle Mark, she really admired him greatly and always enjoyed seeing him stirred up over something.

There was really not half so much talk as she had pretended; she had merely heard the gossipy Mrs. Plum give voice to a few faint wonderings.

These she had exaggerated solely because she saw how it infuriated Winslow. She was a little scared at the fire she had kindled, but comforted herself by thinking she had said nothing for which she could be really blamed.

"I'll tell you exactly how I'm going about it," Winslow assured her. "It has always been my custom when mixed up in matters that I didn't thoroughly understand to employ the services, if available, of somebody who did understand them. So, in this instance, I shall endeavor to get the assistance of the best private detective I can find. And I think I know the very man."

"A detective, Granfer?" exclaimed Joyce. "Why do the work of the police for them?"

“Because they won’t do it for themselves,—at least, they won’t do it properly. Do you suppose if I said to that pack of blunderbusses, ‘Find the murderer, so I needn’t be suspected,’ that they’d find him? Indeed they would not! So, I shall have him found myself.”

“But, Granfer, you’re not suspected—really!”

“Of course you’re not,” added Molly.

“Where there’s smoke, there’s fire,” said Mark, sententiously. “And, beside, Joyce, I’m not sure but it’s right for me to take up this matter. The crime was committed on my premises, and maybe it’s up to me to do what I can to solve its mystery. And, beside that—” his old eyes snapped, “I won’t say but what I’ll be a bit glad to crow over the half-baked idiots who looked over my premises and went away saying they could never learn the truth about the tragedy. There’s an admission for you! A couple of hours research and ready to admit defeat. I’ll show them. Are you with me, Joyce?”

“To the bitter end, Granfer. Tell me what to do first, and—it’s as good as done.”

“That’s the talk! There’s loyalty for you——”

“Don’t you want Burr to help, too?” asked Molly, jealously.

“Of course I do. Joyce and I want all the

help we can get from our own people,—and the big detective will do the rest. Ever hear of him, Joyce? Lorimer Lane?”

“Never, but I’m for him, on your recommendation. When do we start in?”

“I’ll write him now,” and Winslow turned to his desk. “Get out, you two.”

They got out.

CHAPTER IX

AT A BOARDING-HOUSE

THE widow Plum took only men boarders. This, she openly admitted, was because she wished to secure a good husband for her daughter, Poppy. Her mother had pursued the same laudable plan and had successfully married off four daughters.

To be sure, the four husbands had turned out uniformly bad, but, as Mrs. Plum incontrovertibly argued, that might have happened in a less carefully planned matrimonial campaign.

And so, the Plum boarding-house, justly famed for its superior cuisine and pleasant appointments, became easily the most desirable home for unattached men in Willowvale.

Mrs. Plum, though no longer in the first flush of youth, was by no means old, and her tastes and inclinations all ran to modern improvements and new-fangled notions.

Her Dorf car was of the latest model, and her phonograph was equipped with all the newest jazes and song hits.

Moreover, her precious Poppy was garbed in

the most up to date creations and had every new style in bead necklaces as fast as they appeared in the department stores.

Mrs. Plum, though she surreptitiously took a well advertised Obesity Annihilator, still weighed a lot more than the statistical tables approved of. But she was a jolly, bright-eyed, snappy little woman, who devoted herself to her boarders' comfort, with a wary eye ever on the watch for the eventual son-in-law.

The boarders knew of this, in a general way, but they were either careful to make no compromising advances or they frankly competed for the position.

Poppy, herself, a bobbed-haired, flashing-eyed chit, scorned them all, so far, and with unerring appraisal, sized up each newcomer.

It was all a matter of fact proposition; when the right man came, Poppy would marry him if he wanted her to. What could be clearer or more sensible? So the two Plums waited, and though now and then, a boarder of riper years made overtures to the widow, she declared right out she would never marry again, and indeed why should she?

"Every woman ought to be married once," she often said; "but why get trapped twice?"

And so, she gave preference to the younger men for her boarders, and Poppy had at least

plenty of room for observation of the *genus homo*.

Also, pretty Poppy was a favorite with the boys of the neighborhood, yet there were grades of society above her level, and it was these she coveted.

Her mother argued that these superior men would sooner or later come to board at the Plum Cottage, and then the game was as good as won.

So they waited in placid content, and hoped from day to day for the Fairy Prince.

To an applicant who arrived one lovely afternoon in mid September, Mrs. Plum was fain to say nay.

For the man was elderly and almost decrepit in appearance, though his manner was brisk and cordial.

"Oh, now do take me in, Mrs. Plum," he wheedled. "I'm told there's no such cooking in Willowvale as you provide. And I'll only be here now and again,—just now and again."

The man was decently though not modishly dressed, and his face was decorated with a full beard,—an all-round beard, like the Brothers Smith wore on their Famous Cough Drop cartons.

His large, shell-rimmed glasses were slightly amber-tinted, and his black soft felt hat was set carefully on his thick iron gray hair.

“What do you mean by now and again?” demanded the landlady, her face softening as the caller took out a well filled pocket book, ostensibly to extract a card, but,—as she well knew,—to serve as an additional argument in his favor.

“Why, I mean that I’ll be here a day or two, and then off again for several days. Then, pop back for a bit,—and then away again. I am a geologist, here is my card,” and Professor Curran handed over a card which definitely showed the honorary letters that he had acquired to trail after his name.

“A geologist?” she said, a little blankly.

“Yes, I go out in the woods about here and knock off bits of stone and rock, and bring them back and classify them and all that sort of thing,—I can’t describe it all in a moment, but I’ll warrant you’ll be interested when I show you some of my specimens and explain my work to you. Come, now, madam, take me in. I’ll take the room, do you see, permanently, but I’ll be in it only a few days at a time, now and then. Thus, you’ll get full pay, and less than half time work. What say?”

Mrs. Plum considered. This was no chance for Poppy, of course, but the arrangement proposed was a tempting one.

“Well, Professor Curran,” she said, at length, “I ain’t one to stand in my own light. What

you ask is as good for me as it is for you. I can only give you a small room, but it's clean and comfortable. You see, of course, I can't tie up my best rooms to a now and again boarder."

"All right, ma'am, and I'm satisfied with a small room,—but I don't see just why you can't tie up a large one——"

"No, you don't see it, and you needn't try. But the fact remains, and it's the little room, or none."

"The little room, by all means. May I go there at once? I've no luggage with me this time, save an over-night bag, but I'd like to see the room, and if it's O. K. take it from to-day."

The room proved to be all the Professor required, and in less than a half-hour from his arrival, he was established as a regular Plum boarder.

He had brought a parcel of books beside his bag, and he proceeded to give the room quite a homey aspect by arranging his books on the table and placing his toilet appurtenances about.

He nodded his head in satisfaction and Mrs. Plum nodded hers.

For that room was not appropriate to any potential son-in-law, and she was very glad to have it permanently rented on such agreeable terms.

The dining room had small tables around the walls, which looked like planets thrown off from the central sun, the long extension table, at which Mrs. Plum presided, with Poppy at the other end.

Needless to say the most desirable boarders were near Miss Poppy.

As a matter of course, the newcomer was relegated to one of the small tables. Nor did he object to this, though he cast what seemed to Mrs. Plum a longing glance at Poppy's companions.

Although two weeks had elapsed since the murder at the Winslow house and although the sensation it had caused had died down, owing to the failure of the police to find the murderer, yet it was still more or less a subject of discussion and the two other people at the small table where Professor Curran sat, argued about it with interest.

"I have heard of it," the Professor said, looking at them mildly, "but I don't know the latest news about it."

"There isn't any," volunteered one of the men, a pale-faced youth of nondescript appearance. "The woman appeared from nowhere, some unknown person killed her,—that was the verdict,—and then the murderer went back to the nowhere they came from. That seems to be the gist of the story."

"Not very intriguing," the Professor observed and went on with his chicken and waffles, for which particular food combination the Plum Cottage was famous.

"No, there were no clues, no evidence, nothing a detective could lay a hand on."

"Nobody suspected?" asked Curran, glancing up from his final waffle.

"Not definitely. I did hear a rumor that somebody in the house was concerned in the matter, but it was quickly hushed up!"

"Hushed up is a suspicious phrase in itself," the Professor remarked.

"Oh, it didn't go as far as suspicion."

"I know something about that," put in the other man at the table. "I am a friend of Burr Winslow's, and he told me that old man Winslow had been so mad about that suspicion, or hint of a suspicion, that he wrote for Lorimer Lane, the detective to come and look into the matter."

"That's interesting," Curran said; "did Lane come?"

"There was no reply to the letter, Burr told me. They think Lane must be abroad, or off on some case, where he can't be reached; and, anyway, Burr said, the matter has so faded away and everybody has lost interest, that old Mr. Winslow has about decided to let the thing

drop. Of course, it's absurd to suspect him _____."

"Well," Curran looked up quizzically, "old men have been known to be mixed up with flashy appearing young women,—and I read that this dead woman was a gay, sporty sort."

"She was, but Mark Winslow is above reproach. Oh, yes, I know what you are suggesting, but there's nothing of that sort in Winslow's life. The whole town will tell you that."

"The whole town isn't always infallible," retorted the Professor, and then, with a word of excuse, he rose from the table and went up to his room.

"Funny old cove," said one of his table mates, speaking across to his landlady. "Where did you dig him up, Mrs. Plum?"

"He's all right," and Mrs. Plum defended her new boarder. "He's a wise scholar, and worth a dozen of you young whipper-snappers, any day!"

"Oh, he's all right," was the hasty response, for a rebuke from Mrs. Plum was not to be desired. "On further acquaintance, I'm sure he'll prove delightful."

The young man who had quoted Burr Winslow had told the truth.

Mark Winslow had received no reply to his

letter to the celebrated detective, and though he had declared he would follow it up, and try to learn where Lane was, he had not done so, and the days had gone by, each one helping to efface the memories of the tragedy, and each one making Mark Winslow less and less desirous of stirring up the distasteful matter.

Moreover, he had learned that Molly Winslow had greatly exaggerated the public sentiment regarding his own connection with the crime, and he began to think it would be foolish on his part to give such rumors apparent credence by taking any steps to refute them.

So the time went by, and with Winslow's usual avoidance of unpleasant subjects he never spoke of the mystery and no one mentioned it to him.

Also, Winslow was greatly interested in his present occupation of installing Gilray as his private and confidential secretary.

Not too much work was put on the young shoulders,—there were plenty of assistants and stenographers and all that. And Burr was retained to do his full share of the routine duties, but it was Joyce who was put in touch with the most important matters, the most critical situations and the most valuable properties.

Nor did the young man find it irksome. He fully met Mark Winslow's expectations and

hopes, and his quick intellect and clever brain delighted the soul of the older man.

Burr Winslow took his dethronement manfully. He said little, but cheerfully accepted such tasks as were given him and performed them well.

Never forgetful of the fact that if Gilray had not appeared on the scene all Mark Winslow's business would be in his hands, as well as all prospects of inheritance and succession, still Burr bore Gilray no actual grudge.

He was not envious, though he fully realized what he had lost.

But one thing bothered Burr.

He liked Gilray,—no one could help liking the light-hearted, gay-spirited chap, but there were times and occasions when Burr had some doubts of Joyce.

Not of his honesty, or his integrity,—but, vague, indefinable doubts of his personality, his identity.

There was no chance of fraud or imposture, Burr recognized that fact,—and yet,—Joyce didn't seem like a real Winslow.

But when Burr sifted the matter down to that, and found that was all the result he could obtain from his intuitions and imaginations, he sighed and admitted that it was not inevitable that Joyce should be a Winslow. He was, doubtless,

all Gilray. Often he had said that he was like his father in appearance and nature. Often he had regretfully acknowledged he was not a Winslow,—and even confessed he was not to the manner born.

And yet, Gilray was a general favorite.

In the clubs, to which Burr took him,—in the social circles,—among the neighbors in the little community,—everywhere, in fact, Joyce Gilray was accepted and liked quite on his own account, aside from his relation to Mark Winslow.

And Burr conceded all this, he saw the popularity Joyce was attaining, he realized that he was making good on every count, and he wondered if it were not some evil spirit of jealousy in his own heart that made him feel that sense of irritability, of dislike, now and then, at some action or some attitude of his cousin's.

Almost he decided it was. He told himself that he was envious of Gilray's prospects as well as of his present position.

For Joyce's life was a round of luxury and pleasure.

The hours he spent with Mark Winslow in the library were no hardship, for it was merely gaining instruction in managing the great fortune that would one day be his. And the rest of the time Joyce was on pleasure bent. His rooms in New York were of the best and most

comfortable, and he stayed there as often and as long as he liked. His cars,—he had three now, were of the finest and most expensive. His wardrobe was all that could be desired, and with a preëminent social position and innumerable friends, Joyce Gilray's lot was truly enviable,—especially by one who had confidently expected to enjoy it himself.

And, too, Mark Winslow's love and admiration for Joyce knew no bounds.

It was his greatest pleasure to load the young man with favors and gifts. All he required in return was the affection and companionship which Joyce gave him without stint. If he went to the city for a few days, he returned to give Mark a chatty and entertaining account of his doings. He spent hours in the old man's company, and never did Mark Winslow feel neglected or lonely for lack of Joyce's society. The two were fast friends and had many tastes in common.

One of these was old books. Though not a great collector, Winslow had many fine and rare volumes, and in these Joyce was interested. Together they pored over them, and when Joyce offered to make a catalogue of them, Mark Winslow was highly pleased.

The books were taken up to Joyce's sitting room,—a few at a time,—and the work was

carefully and painstakingly done. At a fairly rapid rate, too, for Joyce was quick of action as well as accurate, and now, as September waned, he had the matter well in hand and nearly half finished.

All of this kindly devotion Burr noted, and still something rankled in his breast.

With a sudden decision that was characteristic of him, he concluded to go straight to Joyce and have it out.

Go, he did, and on being told that Gilray was in his rooms, he went upstairs without announcement.

Tapping at the closed door of the sitting room, he heard Joyce's somewhat impatient "Come in!" and he entered.

"Oh, it's you,—hello, Burr," and Joyce sprang up and placed a chair. "What's doing?"

"I see you're busy," and Burr glanced apologetically at the piles of books, the scattered catalogue cards and the filing cabinets.

"Yes, I'm putting in an afternoon on the catalogue. It's no cinch of a job, and I usually leave orders that I'm not to be disturbed when I'm at it. But I'm glad you pushed up. Anything doing?"

"No,—that is, I came to see you on a special errand—and now, I'm here, I'm sorry I came."

"There's a remedy," and Joyce glanced quizzically at the door.

He had been deeply absorbed in his work, which necessitated a lot of tedious but interesting research, and he begrudged the time, if Burr had no errand of importance.

"I know,—” Burr's face lengthened, and his eyes became a little hard. "Look here, old chap, I'm going to say something unpleasant."

"Go to it, then,—best get it over quickly."

"Very well, then—in a nutshell, are you really Joyce Gilray?"

The other gave a good-natured laugh.

"In a nutshell, Burr, I am. Why,—are you sighing for your lost glories? Honestly, old fellow, I don't blame you a bit for feeling the jolt. And that's the reason I don't resent your—er—somewhat impulsive speech, for I know if I were in your place I wouldn't speak to you at all!"

"I've been thinking this thing over, and I'd scorn to spy on you so, I come right to you, and you know, Joyce," Burr went on, with a dogged air of persistence, "you haven't really proved your claims——"

"I say, Burr, don't go too far! Not proved my claims? What about my mother's papers and letters and pictures?—and the amethyst cross?—and well, my grandfather's unquestion-

ing acceptance of me ought to count for something."

"Yes,—but——"

"Look here, Burr, one more word of that sort, and I'll throw you out of that door! And yet,—you're a first class chap," Gilray paused, and stared at the other, "and—hang it all, I like you too well to take the offense that I might take. But, I accept your challenge. For I look on it as a challenge. I will go West, as soon as I can manage it,—stay,—I'll take Grandfather with me! That's the ticket! We'll go out to Pasadena and Los Angeles and Santa Barbara,—all the places I lived as a child, and I'll get what the Good Book calls 'a cloud of witnesses' to prove my identity. I'll find the minister who baptized me,—if anybody did, and I'll trace all the people I can who knew me as I passed along the years,—and surely there will be some of them important or influential enough now, to make their statements believed. There, Burr, what do you say to that plan? Or, if you have any other and better way of going about this thing,—make it known, and I'll consider it. As you know, Grandfather would go to the ends of the earth with me, if I asked him to."

"Yes, he is completely under your thumb——"

"Don't use such an expression, Burr. It

sounds like undue influence. Do you see any signs of that in my relations with Granfer?"

Gilray spoke quietly, but a glitter showed in his eyes, and his manner betokened his patience was nearly exhausted.

"Not exactly that,—but you have certainly gained his entire confidence very rapidly. Why, you have charge of all his affairs. You even open his private mail, and often answer his letters for him."

"All at his direction. You are really arraigning him, not me, Burr. But enough of this. Come with me, let us go down to the library and have this matter out in Grandfather's presence. Tell me before him of what you suspect me,—of what you accuse me. If you consider me an impostor or a fraud, you can have no objection to telling him so." Gilray rose,—he was very angry now, but exceedingly quiet and composed.

"No," said Burr, "I don't want to do that. Not, as you doubtless think, because I am a coward, but because I don't want to do or say anything to pain the old man. And I know how he loves you, and what faith he has in you. Moreover, this is between us,—you've no right to shift it to Uncle Mark's shoulders."

"Oh, if you put it that way—" and Gilray sat down again. "Well then, Burr, the burden of

proof rests with you. If you really think I am not Joyce Gilray," again that little amused laugh, "all you have to do is to prove your opinion a true one. If I can help in any way, let me know. If you conclude it might be well to put the matter before Grandfather, do so—and if," his manner softened, "if, Burr, you change your mind, and decide I'm all right, after all, don't think for a minute, I'll remember this against you. I realize perfectly how you came to have these thoughts. How Granfer's overwhelming kindness and indulgence in my case makes you remember how you thought all these conditions were to be your own. It *must* be galling,—almost unbearable, I admit,—and I am truly sorry for you——"

"Don't be,—I don't want your pity or sympathy."

And without another word, Burr strode from the room.

Joyce gave a deep, thoughtful sigh, and then went back to his interrupted work.

It was two or three days later, about four in the afternoon, when the Winslow doorbell sounded.

Being Thursday, all the servants except Jenks had an afternoon off.

That functionary answered the bell, with a demeanor that spoke of enforced condescension.

The caller was a scholarly looking man who asked to see Mr. Winslow.

"Your name, please," asked the imperturbable butler.

"Professor Curran," was the quiet reply. "Your master does not know me personally, but he knows of me, and has expressed a desire to meet me."

Jenks knew this to be the truth, and his manner changed a degree, as he said, "Walk in, sir, and I'll tell Mr. Winslow you are here."

In the great hall the Professor waited, and immediately came a summons to the library, where Mark Winslow rose to greet him.

Jenks retired, closing the door, and Mark Winslow affably invited his visitor to be seated.

It was not half an hour later, when Jenks, again summoned by the door bell went through the hall. This time it was the postman, and a few moments later, with a handful of letters, the butler approached the library door. It was still closed, and Jenks listened, uncertain whether to intrude with the mail.

Hearing no voices, he concluded the caller had gone, and that Mr. Winslow had let him out himself, as he sometimes did with his friends.

There was no response to Jenks' knock, and

he repeated it. Hearing nothing then, either, he opened the door to place the letters on his master's desk.

He saw Winslow leaning back in his desk chair, in an unnatural, slumped position.

With an exclamation of horror, Jenks dropped the letters and sprang toward the still figure in the chair.

Mark Winslow was bleeding to death from a stab wound in his heart. Or that was what Jenks surmised from the unconscious man's attitude and the slowly flowing blood that had partially congealed round the gash in the bosom of the soft shirt he wore.

Jenks gave a loud scream, not from fear or terror, but for help. He knew all the servants were out, there was nobody to call on, except Joyce, who, he knew was up in his own apartments. So Jenks hoped to make him hear, while he himself ministered to the wounded man.

Various thoughts rushed through Jenks' brain. Should he leave the apparently dying man, while he called a doctor? Should he lift him and try to staunch the blood himself? Or could he get Mr. Joyce to help? The last seemed most hopeful, and he screamed loudly, "Mr. Joyce,—Mr. Joyce!"

The sound aroused the last remnants of fading consciousness in the dying man. He opened his

eyes, as Jenks tenderly supported his head, and whispered, thickly, “No, not Joyce—*not Joyce*——”

At first, Jenks thought he didn’t want to see his grandson, and then a thought struck him.

“Who did it, Mr. Winslow?” he asked, eagerly. “Who hurt you?”

Mark Winslow looked at him with a rational look which faded as quickly as it came. “Not Joyce,” he reiterated, “not my grandson Joyce.” And then, with one final, desperate effort, he murmured, “Tell Burr—not Joyce,—tell Burr so——” and then, his head fell forward on his breast and his spirit fled, just as Joyce, with a horror-stricken face appeared at the library door.

CHAPTER X

THE MYSTERY

"WHAT is it?" Joyce cried, "Jenks *what* has happened? What ails my grandfather?"

"He's dead, Mr. Joyce," the man spoke mechanically. He was still holding Mark Winslow's head against his own breast, still endeavoring to see or feel a flutter of life. But in vain. The weapon that had been used had done its swift and deadly work, and Mark Winslow had breathed his last.

"But," Joyce's eyes were big with horror, "he's—he's been stabbed, Jenks——"

"Yes, sir," still that half-dazed look and toneless speech. "Yes, sir,—but he said you didn't do it, sir——"

"*I* didn't do it!" Joyce now looked as blank as the butler himself.

"That's what he said," Jenks repeated, stolidly. "Oh, Mr. Joyce, can't you see I'm all in! I'm that put about I don't know what I'm doing——"

"I don't blame you, Jenks," Joyce strove to get a grip on his own nerves, and his eyes roved quickly about the room. "Who has been here?"

"That old gentleman,—Professor Curran, he was——"

"But he couldn't have been the murderer!"

"He must have been, Mr. Joyce," Jenks said, earnestly, "for I let him in——"

"How long ago?"

"About half an hour——"

"Time enough for him to have gone away and somebody else arrived——"

"But nobody did—leastwise, nobody rang the bell, until the post-man came——"

"Hush up, Jenks,—let me think——"

Knowing the responsibility devolved on him, Gilray thought deeply for a moment. His eyes darted about the room, now and then resting on the face of Mark Winslow.

Jenks had gently laid the white head back against the high-framed chair, and the handsome features were composed and natural looking.

The butler stood at attention, awaiting orders from one whom he now looked on as his new master.

"What was he killed with?" Gilray exclaimed suddenly.

"That's what I'm thinking, Mr. Joyce,"

Jenks returned. "Whoever did it, made off and took the knife with him."

"Knife? Why not dagger?"

"Look, sir; there's a cut just like the cut in that poor girl who was killed here,—same shape, see?" Jenks bared the breast of the dead man, but Joyce put up a warning hand.

"Don't do that! Don't touch him! You mustn't,—now, I'll call Doctor Murray and the police——"

"The police again—Good Lord!"

Without further words, Gilray went to the telephone and called the numbers he wanted.

Before the officials he had sent for arrived, he called Burr Winslow.

"Come right over, Burr," the other said; "a terrible thing has happened—I don't want to say more over the wire,—but hurry over, won't you?"

Burr reached the house just as Dr. Murray put in an appearance, and Jenks admitted the two men.

The library door stood open, and the butler pointed that way.

"What—what does it mean?" cried the doctor as he sprang to the dead man's side. "Why, this cut is exactly like that on the unknown girl we found here! Who did this?"

"We—we don't know, sir—" Jenks answered,

for Gilray and Burr Winslow were staring at each other in a sort of wordless inquiry.

And then the police came, and in a moment Dr. Tenney, the County Medical Examiner, and Dr. Murray were conducting an examination.

A police lieutenant and the Detective, Fuller, were looking carefully about the room, but refrained from speech.

At last Dr. Tenney reported.

"Death from a stab wound," he said, succinctly, "weapon probably a large knife,—singularly like the one used to kill that strange woman we found on your porch here. Driven straight at his heart, and hit its aim. Dead about half to three quarters of an hour, I should say, but maybe a little more or less. Hard to tell exactly."

"Killed instantly?" Dr. Murray said interrogatively.

"Practically," Tenney agreed. "But maybe not, a man of Winslow's vitality might have lived, even consciously, for a few moments——"

"He did, sir," Jenks broke in. "He spoke after I found him——"

"He did!" cried Fuller, waking from his reverie. "Tell of your finding him! What did he say?"

Jenks looked important. He was not at all averse to being in the limelight, and he felt sure

that as in the case of that other tragedy, so now, he knew more than any one about the earliest facts.

“He had a caller, Mr. Winslow had,” the butler began, and Fuller snapped out, “Who was it?”

“Professor Curran, sir.”

“Who’s he?”

“I don’t know, sir. He was an old gentleman who came to see Mr. Winslow. I let him in——”

“What time was this?”

“About four o’clock. I’m always on the door Thursdays, as all the others have the afternoon off. I let the gentleman in and showed him into the library here, and Mr. Winslow spoke to him like he was glad to see him. He asked him to sit down, and I went out,—and that’s all I know about that part of it.”

“Go on,” said Tenney, briefly, and Jenks continued.

“Then, a bit later, the postman came, and I took the mail, and I came to the door of this room, sir, and I tapped, but there was no answer. So I opened the door to lay the letters on Mr. Winslow’s desk,—and I saw him——”

Jenks stopped talking, with the air of a man who has no more to say.

“You hadn’t let the old gentleman out?”

“No, sir.”

"You didn't hear Mr. Winslow let him out?"

"No, sir,—but I was in the kitchen, and that's some way off. Maybe he did let him out,—or maybe the man let himself out——"

"Don't surmise." Dr. Tenney frowned at him. "When you saw Mr. Winslow, what did you do?"

"I rushed to him," Jenks spoke a little resentfully now, "and when I saw he was dead—or, I thought he was dead, I screamed as loud as I could for help——"

"But the servants were all out."

"I know, sir, but I didn't stop to think, I just shouted. Then I called loudly for Mr. Joyce, and he came as quick as he could."

"And Mr. Winslow spoke?"

"Yes, sir," this was to be Jenk's great moment, and he made ready for it.

He drew himself up importantly, and said, "Yes, sir, he spoke his dying words—to me."

"He said, 'Not Joyce,—not my grandson Joyce!' and I saw at once he wanted to shield Mr. Joyce, in case he was suspected——"

"Cut out your own opinions or surmises," the detective thundered at him, "repeat only the spoken words."

"All right, sir," and Jenks turned sulky. "Then, I said, 'Who did this, Mr. Winslow? Who stabbed you?' and he looked at me quite

conscious, sir, and he says, 'Not Joyce,—tell Burr not Joyce!' and with those words, sir, he died,—died in these very arms!"

Jenks held out his arms as if they were henceforth sacred to a memory, and indeed, quite outside his love of a dramatic scene the butler was thrilled with the sad horror of the tragedy.

Then Burr Winslow spoke, "He said, 'Tell Burr not Joyce!' What *could* he have meant by that?"

"He must have thought I would be suspected of this murder," Gilray said, speaking calmly, but with a stern look on his face. "And it would seem, Burr, that he must have thought you would suspect me. At least, I can't put any other construction on the words. Can you, Dr. Tenney?"

"We haven't come to that part of the inquiry yet," was the rather short reply. "We want to assemble all the facts before we begin to put a construction on them. That's all Mr. Winslow said, then, Jenks?"

"Yes, sir, every word, sir. Then he sort of sighed and stopped breathing."

"You've seen men die before, Jenks?"

"Oh, yes, sir, I was orderly in a hospital for a year—I was——"

"Then you know Mr. Winslow was both conscious and rational when he said those words?"

"Yes, sir; and the effort exhausted his last drop of strength and he went right out, sir."

Jenks' solemn face attested to the truth of his description, and then Fuller took up the inquiry.

"Where were you at this time, Mr. Gilray?" he asked.

"Upstairs in my sitting-room."

"How were you engaged?"

"I was working on some cataloguing I am doing for my grandfather."

"You'd been up there all the afternoon?"

"Yes, ever since luncheon. I often put in an afternoon on the work, which is now nearing completion."

"You heard the doorbell ring,—or the arrival of Professor Curran?"

"Yes, and I also saw the visitor approach the house. I chanced to glance out of my front window as this elderly man came along the sidewalk and turned in here. I never saw him before, and I looked at him with a slight curiosity. Then I heard the bell ring and heard Jenks admit him. I thought no more of the incident, and I heard no other sounds from downstairs until I heard the postman's ring. To that also I paid no special heed and a moment or so later I heard Jenks scream. Then I rushed downstairs and found my grandfather dead and Jenks holding

him in his arms. After I pulled myself together from the shock of the discovery I telephoned for Dr. Murray, for the police and for my cousin, Mr. Winslow. The rest you all know."

Gilray sat back in his chair, like a man exhausted after an ordeal.

"There's no one else in the house?" Fuller asked, turning to the butler.

"No one at all, sir," Jenks returned, knowing he meant servants.

"Then we have all the history of the case that we can get," Fuller said, "and unless some one came in here between the Professor's exit and the postman's call, we must conclude the old gentleman is the murderer."

"Had any one done that, I should have heard him," Gilray said; "my room door was open and I heard all that went on downstairs. Though of course, being absorbed in my work, and not looking for anything unusual I paid no attention to the matter."

"Yet you saw the old gentleman arrive," Fuller said.

"Yes; I often glance out of the window and naturally I notice any one coming into this place. That's why I think no one else came in, except the postman, and his visit being part of the day's routine I gave it no thought."

"Yet some one came in, and murdered my

uncle," Burr Winslow said, his face stormy. "I don't for a minute believe it was that old professor! I know who he is,—and I'm sure he's a harmless old thing."

"You know him!" and Gilray looked up in surprise. "Who is he?"

"Yes, who is he?" echoed Fuller. "Your knowledge is most opportune, Mr. Winslow. Who is he?"

"Professor Curran is a scholar and a geologist," Burr began. "He boards at Mrs. Plum's boarding-house, over on the other side of town. I never met him personally, but I have a friend who lives there and he has told me of the queer old man and his eccentricities. I can't imagine any reason why he should kill my uncle."

"Can you imagine any reason why anybody should kill him?" Fuller asked, eagerly.

"I can imagine reasons," Burr frowned; "but I can't think you want imaginations, Mr. Fuller. Facts, I assume, is what you're after. But what was the weapon and where is it?"

Fuller looked at him scornfully.

"Don't think we're neglecting our work, Mr. Winslow," he said. "The weapon is not in evidence. The murderer took it away with him. You didn't see it when you first discovered your master, did you, Jenks?"

"No,—oh, no, sir."

"You saw nothing of it when you came downstairs, Mr. Gilray?"

"No," Joyce answered, "but I, like Mr. Burr Winslow, wondered that you seem to ignore the matter of the weapon. I always supposed that was a prominent question in any murder mystery."

"It is," and Fuller assumed a look of superiority. "But we don't see it here, so we conclude the criminal took it away with him. Why discuss it?"

"Or he may have hidden it in the room," Gilray's eyes traveled about the library, and his gaze rested on the various cabinets, bookcases and tables.

"If he did, we'll find it," Fuller declared. "You see, the wound is precisely like the stab in the throat of the young woman who was found on your doorstep——"

"Then the same man killed both victims!" Gilray cried out. "And that girl *was* some one my grandfather knew——"

"Oh, don't go so fast, Joyce," Burr exclaimed. "You always wanted to believe Uncle Mark knew something about that girl—I know he didn't."

"You don't *know* it, Burr, however much you believe it. But, I say, Mr. Fuller, if you have any suspicions of that old Professor person, why

don't you get after him before he can get away. Like my cousin, I can't see why he should kill anybody, but, after all, you've no one else to suspect definitely,—have you?"

"No," said Fuller, "we haven't. Well, Tenney, I think I'll get on trail of this professor—will you give me the address of that boarding-house, Mr. Winslow?—and you and Dr. Murray look after matters here."

"I'll go with you, if I may, Mr. Fuller," Burr Winslow said; "I can be of no use here,—you don't need me, do you, Joyce?" He turned to him as he spoke; "if I can do anything, of course——"

"No, no, Burr, go ahead. Go with Mr. Fuller, and perhaps you two can learn something that will help. Lord knows I can't see any light anywhere. Who would kill grandfather, and how can there be any connection between his death and that of the utter stranger who came here to die?"

Burr Winslow went off with the detective and Gilray turned to Dr. Murray and the Examiner, who were still talking over details of Mark Winslow's death.

"Please advise me," he said, speaking to both of them. "I was entirely in my grandfather's confidence, and I know all about his estate and business matters,—but in the present circum-

stances I feel utterly at a loss. I am ready to be advised, and I want to do the right thing."

"I understand," said Dr. Murray, kindly. "This is a hard situation for you to meet, Joyce. Your grandfather adored you, and you were all the world to him. But, for the dignity of the house, you must brace up and take the helm——"

"That's just what I mean," Joyce said, grateful for this understanding. "Now, Dr. Tenney, will there be any painful scenes—I mean, inquests and that sort of thing——"

"Yes, Mr. Gilray, there will. You may as well meet that knowledge half way. A man like Mark Winslow cannot be put out of existence without the town and the state rising up to inquire the why and wherefore. That unknown young woman was in different case. She, apparently, had no relatives or friends who cared what became of her. The police did all they could to find out more about her, but so far, little light has been shed on that mystery. Now, it may be that the two crimes are connected, but I scarcely think so. There is no link that I can see, but the shape of the wound. And there is more than one big, ugly knife in this world. Yes, Mr. Gilray, there will be a great hue and cry over this matter. You will be necessarily more or less dragged into it as a

material witness,—indeed, you and your butler are the only such we have. You will have to tell your stories over and over again,—but, I take it, you'll be willing to do so in the hope of finding your grandfather's murderer."

"Yes, I shall," and Gilray turned a determined face to the Examiner. "That's the sort of help and advice I wanted. I am unversed in these things, and I hoped I could be unmolested—alone with my grief. For, as nobody seems to appreciate, I am bowled over by this sorrow. To me, the crime and its horror is less appalling than the fact that I have lost my dear friend and relative,—my only one,—and that so shortly after I found him. Don't think me a womanish sort, sir, but I'd be glad to go to my room and stay there till I can adjust myself to my new affliction."

"Why, of course, Mr. Gilray——"

"Oh, don't misunderstand me. I don't propose to do it. I am ready, since you show me my duty, to take my place as head of the house, and to use every effort to bring to justice the man who is responsible for this outrageous crime."

"And you don't think it could have been the old professor?"

"I don't say that. Of course it could have been he. I only meant that at first thought he seemed unlikely. Yet who can say? He may

have been an old time enemy of my grandfather's of whom I never heard. Those things are outside my experience,—I mean things like deduction and consideration of evidence and all that. Yet if you expect me to do detective work, I'm ready and willing to try."

"No, boy, no." Dr. Murray spoke up. "You've enough on your heart and mind to go through with all the duties that will devolve on you as your grandfather's successor and representative. You're his sole heir, aren't you, Joyce?"

"Yes, Dr. Murray. Grandfather made no secret of his will or his intentions. He left bequests to Burr and his mother, and to other relatives, but the bulk of his estate is now mine."

The lieutenant, who was still present, looked closely at Gilray's face, but though a keen observer, he could see no sign of satisfaction or of contentment at the acquisition of this estate, but instead, a calm and business-like expression as he made the simple statement of the Winslow affairs.

"And what do you suppose your grandfather meant by his dying words?" Lieutenant Porter asked, suddenly.

"I suppose he meant just what he said," Gilray looked surprised at the question.

“But why would he say that? Why asseverate that it was not you, and that Mr. Burr Winslow should be told so?”

Gilray paused a moment, then said:

“I can only visualize it this way. My grandfather was stabbed by somebody, with intent to kill. That we know. Now, my grandfather had a very rapidly working mind. I have no doubt he knew that he was fatally stabbed, he knew that the murderer would be sought,—and may have known that he would probably get away, as he has,—and then, my grandfather feared that I might be suspected of his death. This is the only explanation I can think of for his speech. He wanted to declare with his dying breath that I, his beloved grandson, was innocent. Good Lord! Why should *I* want to kill him? A man who loved me devotedly, who gave me everything I wanted, who was my congenial companion and friend as well as my loving grandfather! And yet,—and perhaps his mind was a little unbalanced by his approaching death,—he feared I *might* be accused and he forestalled it. Could devotion go further?”

“No,” said Murray, “it was wonderful. Just like Mark Winslow! I’ve known him for years, and I say it’s just like him.”

“Why did he say, ‘Tell Burr’?” went on Porter.

Joyce hesitated, then said, frankly; "I can't tell you, unless he feared that possibly Burr might think I did it. There's no one else in the house, you know. But I think Burr knows me better than to think it."

"I think so, too," said Dr. Murray.

CHAPTER XI

WHERE IS THE PROFESSOR?

As Fuller, accompanied by Burr Winslow, stepped down from the verandah steps they were accosted by a man who had been mowing the lawn.

"What's happened?" he whispered. "Murder?"

"Yes," returned Fuller, tersely, "what have you seen?"

"Who done it?" the man's white face was tense and eager.

"We don't know. Have you been here long?"

"All the afternoon,—ever since one o'clock."

"Tell me everybody you have seen go in or come out."

"That's easy—but I s'pose you mean out the front door——"

"Out any door. Go on," impatiently.

"Well, the servants went out the back gate,—all except Mrs. Jameson and she came out the side door and around out the front way."

"Who is Mrs. Jameson?"

"The housekeeper," Burr put in. "She's a new one in the place of Mrs. Swift."

"When did they go?" asked Fuller, watching the man closely.

"Between two and three, I sh'd say. Then nobody came or went till 'long about four, when a rusty old guy came in."

"How do you know the time so nearly?"

"I keep tab by the strikin' of the church clock. I'm none too fond of shovin' the lawn mower of a hot afternoon, and I'm glad to hear the hours passin'."

"Describe this old man."

"Well, he wasn't so awful old,—leastwise he seemed spry enough, but he limped a little,—not 'sif he was lame, but more 'sif his boots hurt him."

"You were very observant," remarked Fuller.

"Well, that's what I saw. And he had grayish whiskers and sorta longish gray hair—not very long but like it needed cuttin'."

"Go on."

"That's all I remember specially 'bout his appearance. He went up on the steps and rang the bell and Jenks let him in. That's all I know."

The man's clear blue eyes looked into the detective's face with a candid gaze.

"Who are you? What's your name?" Fuller said.

"I'm Dickson,—Mr. Winslow here knows me. I keep these lawns in shape."

Dickson looked round with pride on the velvety grass, and neatly trimmed shrubbery.

"Yes, I know him," Burr said; "you come two or three times a week, don't you, Dickson?"

"Yes, sir,—'cordin's necessary. Please, won't you tell me what's happened inside?"

He looked pathetically curious, and Fuller said:

"Why, yes,—it's no secret. Mr. Mark Winslow is dead—killed by a stab wound——"

"Then that old man done it," Dickson cried. "And, by gum! he never come out again! Where is he?"

"He must have gone away by some rear door," Fuller looked thoughtful. "You're sure he didn't come out this way? Were you here all the time? Did you see the postman come?"

"Sure!" Dickson declared, answering all the questions at once. "I been right on this job all afternoon, I tell you. I seen the old man go in and I didn't see him come out. Then, some later——"

"How much later?"

"I dunno ezackly,—I ain't got a watch, mebbe 'bout twenty minutes or so,—the postman came, and he rang the bell——"

"Didn't he whistle?"

“No sir, he never whistles here,—Mr. Winslow don’t like him to. He always rings. Well, he rang, and Jenks, he come to the door and took the letters and the Postman went on. Of course, I saw all that. Then, the next thing I knew, Dr. Murray came, and the police people, and Mr. Burr Winslow, and—oh, my land,—it was time for me to quit work—but I never thought of that—oh, sir, did the old man kill Mr. Winslow? *Kill him?*”

“Mr. Winslow is dead,” Fuller said. “We don’t know who killed him. Where do you live, my man? You’ll probably be called on to repeat all this.”

“Yes, sir,—to be sure, sir.”

Dickson gave his address, and after a few more questions the others went on.

“Strange thing about the old gentleman’s disappearance,” Burr began.

“Strange, if he’s innocent,” Fuller said. “But if he’s the murderer, and it certainly looks like it, then, naturally he escaped by some back door or window.”

“Why would he? When he came so openly?”

“For various reasons. Perhaps he was in a nervous funk, and didn’t want to encounter the gardener again. Perhaps there were telltale stains on his clothing—perhaps he feared Jenks would appear in the hall——”

“But how did he get out?”

“I don’t know the house well enough to answer that. But there are several outside doors, I suppose.”

“Yes, doors on all four sides.”

“Then he probably left by the side door opposite where the gardener was at work.”

“But Dickson was on the front lawn,—he would have seen anybody——”

“Well, the old man had to get out some way, didn’t he? He’s not there now. So, he must have left by some exit,—window or door—which was outside the range of observance of either Jenks or Dickson. I felt it necessary to trail him to his home, rather than search the Winslow house. But the others will do that. They’ll find out how he made his getaway.”

“You’re sure he was the murderer?”

“All I can say, he’s our best bet so far. We ought to learn a lot here.”

They had reached the boarding-house, and in a few moments were in the little parlor, talking with Mrs. Plum.

“Professor Curran?” she said, as they asked for the man, “why, he’s out, I think. I’m sure I saw him go out an hour or more ago. But I dare say he’ll soon be back,—want to wait?”

She eyed her visitors curiously, sensing a serious errand.

"I want a talk with you, Mrs. Plum," and Fuller told her briefly who he was. "Tell me all you know of Professor Curran."

But, though she tried, Mrs. Plum couldn't make a very long story. It seemed she knew little or nothing of her elderly boarder, save that he was a geologist, an occasional visitor and a quiet, well-behaved one.

"Where's his home?" Fuller asked.

"In New York. He comes up here now and then to get specimens for his geology work."

Fuller looked thoughtful. He distrusted that geology work. His mind was full of theories that included an old-time enemy of Mark Winslow's coming now and then to Willowvale, and when the time was ripe carrying out a plan that had resulted in that day's tragedy.

If this were true, then the "Professor" had disappeared for good and all and was, doubtless, already beyond their grasp.

"Let me see his room, Mrs. Plum," Fuller commanded, and trembling now with apprehension, the landlady led the way and her two callers followed.

The bedroom was small, plain and in good order.

Fuller looked swiftly round it, then dove into the closet and hastily ran over the clothes hanging there. They were not numerous; an old

suit, which, Mrs. Plum explained, he wore when hunting specimens in the woods. An antiquated dressing-gown, of flowered woollen stuff, and carpet slippers. A pair of old, stout boots, overshoes, a stout stick and an umbrella,—these were about all the wardrobe showed.

Fuller turned to the table, which served also as desk and bookcase.

The writing materials were few and cheap; the books were all works on geology and kindred subjects; and a small typewriter was the only modern or worthwhile object in view.

A letter rack held a few opened letters, but Fuller found these to be mostly circulars or advertisements of books or treatises on Geology.

Clearly, Professor Curran was a devoted Geological student, or—wished to appear so.

A few of Mrs. Plum's receipted bills and some odds and ends of newspaper clippings completed the toll of the table's contents.

Examination of the toilet articles and personal appointments gave no further light of the man's character. They were colorless, ordinary implements, plain but substantial, just such as might be expected of a bookish old man.

"A Sherlock Holmes might find something of importance, but I don't see a thing!" declared Fuller, looking discouraged. "Just a lot of clothes and things any old codger might have.

If he killed Mark Winslow there's no evidence here to hint at it."

"Killed Mark Winslow! What are you talking about?" cried a hearty young voice from the hallway, and a wondering face looked in at the bedroom door.

"Why, hello, Burr Winslow, what are you doing here?" the same voice exclaimed. "And Mr. Fuller, the detective! What's up, Mrs. Plum?"

"Now who asked you in here, Mr. Robbins?" and the landlady looked annoyed. "I do wish, gentlemen, you'd lower your voices. It ain't very nice for me to have these goings on in my house. I keep a quiet, genteel home for my boarders, and here's detectives all over it——"

"Come in, Robbins, and shut the door," Burr Winslow said, quickly; "now, Mrs. Plum, you go out, if you like, but we want to ask Mr. Robbins a little about this man. What do you know of Professor Curran, Sam?"

"Not much,—why?" Young Robbins stared curiously, and Mrs. Plum ignored the invitation to depart.

"Well, what little, then? Tell it."

"I've only seen the old chap a few times. He sits at our table when he's here, which isn't often, is it, Mrs. Plum?"

"No, not often," replied the bewildered woman.

"Go on, Sam," Burr commanded. "What sort of man is he?"

"Oh, an old bookworm—daft on rocks—geological specimens, you know. No interest in us young chaps, no interest in the lady boarders, or in anything but his digging up rocks. His table manners are good enough but he's a little eccentric——"

"Just how?" asked Fuller.

"Oh, he'll jump up from the table as he swallows his last mouthful, and scoot out of the dining-room without so much as 'Excuse me'; nothing very rude or boorish, but more absent-minded or preoccupied, you know."

"Had you ever any reason to think he was other than he seemed?" the detective inquired.

"Well, that's funny," Robbins returned. "I never did, until the last time he was here,—last week, it was. Somehow, then, I caught a gleam in his eye that made me think he might be younger than he seemed."

"Could he be a younger man, in disguise?" Fuller asked. "Are his whiskers and his apparent age false——"

"Lord, no! That sagebrush all over his chin can't be false! I never saw such a growth,—not long, but thick, bushy—I guess he grew that alfalfa himself."

Fuller was disappointed. He had formed

suddenly a new theory. He had thought that possibly this old professor was the detective that Mark Winslow had brought from the city to look into the murder of the strange woman on his porch. It was a theory all Fuller's own, it had sprung full armed from his own brain, and he hated to discard it. If it were true, then of course, the old man was not the murderer of Mark Winslow,—but Fuller was by no means sure that he was. It was all very mysterious.

But the Professor must be tracked down, whoever he was.

Robbins, who was an acquaintance of Burr Winslow's had become deeply interested. Quickly getting the facts from Burr, he began to evolve theories. "Sure, the old guy killed him," he declared. "It's clear enough. Curran was an old-time enemy of Mr. Winslow's,—he came here, posing as a geologist and all that,—and now, when he got ready, he went over there and pulled it off. You'll never see Curran again."

Sam Robbins was the alert and alive type of Young American. He was self-reliant and self-confident, sure of his facts and positive of his opinions. A quick thinker and inclined to jump at conclusions, he sized up the situation at once to his own satisfaction and proclaimed the result.

Robbins was strong and active, physically, with dark hair and clear dark eyes that snapped with decision.

"Going to get busy, Mr. Fuller?" he inquired, less impertinent than interested. "Going to track down old Curran—or try to? I'll bet he'll lead you a chase! Let me help, won't you? Oh, come now, don't be a piggy-wig!"

The last appeal was brought forth by the unassenting look on Fuller's face. He was a little jealous of this young man's quick manner and feared that he would discover clues where the detective failed or was dilatory.

"Let me help, too! What is it, Sam?" and another element was added to the strangely assorted group, as Poppy Plum opened the door softly and came into the room.

"I've been listening at the keyhole," she declared shamelessly, "and I want to be in the ring."

"Now, look here," Fuller began sternly, "I came over here to conduct an investigation,—I don't want the whole crowd in it with me——"

"Put 'em out, then," said Miss Poppy, calmly. "I tell you, Mr. Detective Fuller, there's nobody here that can help you but me and Sam. We are the people you want——"

The girl was saucy, even insolent, but so vivaciously pretty, so overflowing with en-

thusiasm and so possessed of charm and magnetism that few had ever been able to resist her or to deny her requests.

"Now, Miss Poppy," Fuller began, but Poppy saw her chance.

"Any way," she said, "I can tell you things about old Curran that nobody else knows. You see I take care of his room——"

"Poppy," cried her mother, "you come along with me. Don't pay any attention to her, Mr. Fuller, she doesn't know what she's talking about."

"Be quiet, Mrs. Plum," and Fuller gave her a glance of stern reproof. "Now, Miss Poppy, just what do you mean? Tell anything you know that may throw the least light on the personality of the Professor."

But Poppy's whimsical mind had changed again.

"I don't know a thing!" she cried, "I was just trying to get a rise out of you! I don't know a thing about that old curmudgeon, and I don't want to. He's as dead as the old fossils he digs up, and as useless!"

And no urging on the part of the detective or Burr Winslow could make her admit that she had meant anything more than a joke by her assertion of knowledge.

"Come on, then," Fuller said, at last, "we're

getting nowhere by staying here any longer, and Lord knows there's enough to be done. Of course, Tenney will look after matters at the Winslow house, but I've got to scare up that old man, or get some news of him somehow. I suppose the Railroad Station is a good guess, but I doubt if he went away on a train—it'd be too easy to trace him, and you can take it from me, he's a slick proposition."

"You bet he is!" Robbins exclaimed. "I'll declaim on Friday afternoons that Friend Curran is more than a match for any of us."

"How about his being a detective himself?" Fuller growled, more to see how it struck Robbins than because it voiced his own opinion.

"That's it!" Burr Winslow cried. "I always felt sure Uncle Mark didn't mean to drop that matter of the murdered woman, and it would be just like him to get Lorimer Lane up here, incog., and let him investigate. Then you see, he went over to report to Uncle Mark——"

"Then he wasn't the murderer," Robbins said.

"No, of course not. I don't think he was anyway—maybe he saw the murderer come, and saw him go, and—went after him—that's where he disappeared to!"

"Ingenious, Mr. Winslow," Fuller said, "but hardly enough evidence to warrant that conclusion. In that case, how did the murderer

get into the Winslow house without Dickson's seeing him?"

"The same way he got out," returned Burr, promptly. "And the way Curran got out,—if he *was* the detective. I tell you, Fuller, we can't bother about how they got out, since we know they did get out——"

"We don't know anything," Fuller said, sententiously. "But our first line is to track down Curran and then, if he *is* Lorimer Lane, I've no reason to keep on with my own theories."

"If he's Lorimer Lane, and if he wants to disappear, we won't find him," Burr said, positively and Sam Robbins added;

"If he's the murderer, some old enemy of Mr. Winslow's, you won't find him either."

"He's the detective," Poppy announced, solemnly, but would vouchsafe no amplification of her declaration.

Mrs. Plum had already slipped away, and when the others found her they found her confabbing with Mrs. Swift, the former housekeeper at the Winslow home. Having been dismissed from there, she had obtained a position as assistant to Mrs. Plum, who was very glad to make use of her services.

But though the two women were talking as hard as they could, which is saying considerable, they had no enlightening hints for the detective.

He put a few questions to Mrs. Swift, but she could tell him nothing of interest or importance concerning the Winslow household.

She was ready to denounce Joyce Gilray, as it was on his account that she had been discharged, but this Burr Winslow would not allow.

He discounted her spiteful remarks by telling Fuller of her dismissal, whereupon the detective lost interest in her recital.

They were about to depart when a violent peal came from the door-bell and in a few moments Molly Winslow was among them.

"Burr!" she cried, "I've hunted all over for you! What are you doing here?"

"There, there, mother," he said, "don't go into hysterics. I'm trying to help run down Uncle Mark's murderer. You've been there?"

"Yes, of course, I just came from there. The house is full of people,—all the neighbors are in there, condoling with Joyce and all that. What have you learned here?" she looked about curiously.

"Nothing definite. We've looked through the Professor's effects——"

"Who is that professor?" cried Molly. "What was he doing at Mark Winslow's? Why would he kill him?"

"Mother," said Burr, suddenly, "do you know anything in Uncle Mark's past life that

would make anybody persecute him or hound him down?"

"Goodness, no! what an idea! Do you mean Mark did something wrong——"

"For any reason. I mean do you know of any shady episode, or any old quarrel——"

"No, Burr, I don't. For goodness' sake don't harry the poor man, now he's dead. Mark Winslow was the soul of honor and all that sort of thing. He had a strange temper, he was unforgiving—you know about his daughter's elopement,—but there was never a reason for any one to come and kill him——"

"You mean, no reason that you know of, Mrs. Winslow," Fuller said, "there may have been affairs in his life of which you know nothing."

"Of course there may," put in Mrs. Swift. "And there were. Many's the time I've come upon him unexpectedly, in his library, when his desk was spread with papers and he was sitting there, his head buried in his hands, like he was agonized over something or other."

"Very interesting, Mrs. Swift," Fuller said, "but not definite enough. You don't know of any enemy he had, do you?"

"No, I don't," she declared, though but for a warning glance from Burr, she would have referred to the arrival of the grandson.

"Well, I do," said Molly Winslow, "I know

of lots of enemies Mark Winslow had,—but not one who would come in and kill him. Business enemies, I mean,——”

“Now, mother,” Burr said, “don’t trump up such things. Every business man has enemies in that sense, but Uncle Mark’s murderer was a desperate enemy, a man who planned deeply and diabolically. It is a mysterious crime and a terrible one. I think you women must keep out of it——”

“I should say so!” Fuller chimed in, and then Poppy interrupted, with:

“Yes, mother, you and Mrs. Swift and Mrs. Winslow don’t know what you’re talking about when you discuss these matters. Now, I do. Look here, Mr. Detective Fuller, don’t you think it pretty queer that the murderer, whoever he was, knew enough to choose Thursday afternoon for his visit,—when he knew all the servants would be out of the house, except old Jenks?”

Fuller glared at her.

“I can’t see that that has any bearing on the case,” he returned, in an acid tone of voice, “and I advise you, Miss, to keep out of this matter yourself. Even less than older women do you know anything about these things.”

“That’s all very well, Mr. Detective Fuller,” and the red lips drew themselves together in

impudent fashion. "But I do know a thing or two,—and you'll be glad to come to me for information, before you're through!"

"Don't pay any attention to her, Mr. Fuller," cried the harassed Mrs. Plum, "she's just talking to show off. She doesn't know anything about Professor Curran that I don't know, and that's just nothing at all beyond what I've told you."

"Look here, Fuller," said Sam Robbins, "you leave Miss Poppy to me. If she knows anything that has a bearing on this case, I'll let you know——"

"Huh,—think you're smart—" began Poppy, indignantly, but Robbins gave her a look and she quite suddenly ceased talking.

And then, to Mrs. Plum's great relief, her callers departed, Fuller to go back to Headquarters, and Molly and Burr to the Winslow home.

"You must not talk so much, mother," Burr said, as they walked along. "You'll make trouble for me and yourself too, if you do."

"I'll say what I choose," Molly Winslow returned, "and you can't stop me, either."

CHAPTER XII

LORIMER LANE

WITH the passing of Mark Winslow and the inheritance of the estate, a new dignity seemed to invest the manner and behavior of Joyce Gilray.

He held long confabs with Harvey Brett, the new lawyer who had been employed in Barry's place.

Brett was somewhat of servile type, and knowing that his predecessor had been discharged for undue inquisitiveness, he was careful to avoid any such fault.

As a matter of fact Gilray was more familiar with the financial affairs of the Winslow estate than the lawyer was, and legal advice was all the young heir asked for or desired.

The funeral services had been held with all the pomp and ceremony appropriate to the obsequies of such an important citizen, and neighbors and friends had flocked round Joyce with offers of help and hospitality until the young man was fairly bewildered by their kindness.

He accepted little of it, though most courteous and grateful in his refusals. He kept much to himself, deputing Mrs. Jameson to see many of the callers, and requesting Brett to look after business matters.

But to the Detective, Fuller, or to any members of the police force, he was always at home and ready for an interview.

"You see," he said to Fuller, "until after the funeral we can't—that is, I can't do much. But when that is over, I want to take hold of this mystery of my grandfather's death and solve it. Meantime, you do all you can in the way of investigation and report to me your findings."

The detectives did all they could and the day after the funeral Fuller came to report.

"I'm up against it, Mr. Gilray," he said; "I'm certain that Mr. Winslow was killed by that Professor Curran, but where he is or who he is, we can't find out."

"I can understand your not finding out where he is, but what do you mean by not knowing who he is? Surely, a Professor of Geology must have a definite standing, a record of some sort, somewhere."

"You'd think so, of course," Fuller sighed; "but that's just it. Apparently he hasn't,—and so, we're inclined to think that he wasn't a professor at all."

“What was he?”

“An enemy of Mr. Winslow’s,—an old-time acquaintance, say, who pretended to be a professor and came here with the purpose of killing Mr. Winslow.”

“What about the theory that he may have been a detective in disguise?”

“I don’t think that is the truth, Mr. Gilray, and I’ll tell you why. If he’d been a detective, in Mr. Winslow’s employ, working on the case of that murdered woman, he wouldn’t have come here that day—and then, disappeared! That’s the strange part of it all,—the man’s disappearance. Why, he came here, Jenks let him in, and he never was seen again by anybody. What became of him?”

“He must have slipped out some side door—or through some window——”

“Why would he do that? But, that isn’t the point,—the point is he *couldn’t* have done it. You see, Dickson was on the front lawn all the time. Now, Dickson isn’t a man who is so wrapped up in his work that he doesn’t notice what goes on about him. He’s rather of a curious nature. He saw everybody that passed by. He’s mentioned several motor cars and pedestrians, too, who went by. We’ve checked them up and found his story true. He saw the old professor come in the place and go up on the

front porch. He saw Jenks let him in, and he never saw him come out. Then he saw the postman come and go, and right after that the excitement began. Now, what became of that professor?"

"Now, look here, Fuller," Joyce looked straight at him, "that man had to get away somehow. He didn't remain in this house. We have to admit that. Therefore, he got away. There are several ways he could have——"

"How, Mr. Gilray, just how?"

"Well, there's a side door on the other side of the house, toward the back, you know. That is quite outside the range of Dickson's vision and from it a path goes directly back to the woods——"

"Yes, sir, but that door was locked,—Jenks told me so. The man couldn't have gone out that way——"

"Jenks says that door was locked?" Gilray's face expressed surprise.

"Yes sir, he says he's sure of it. You don't—you haven't any suspicion of Jenks, have you, Mr. Gilray?"

"I haven't any suspicion of anybody, Fuller," and Joyce Gilray looked weary and harassed, "except, of course, that Professor Curran. I daresay he was somebody my grandfather knew,—in fact, he must have been, for Jenks says he

greeted him pleasantly when he arrived. Now, either Curran killed my grandfather or he didn't. But if he didn't, why did he sneak away secretly? That is the reason I suspect Curran. He did disappear, however he managed it, and it must have been because he was the criminal. I hold that he might have slipped out at the front door and front gate when Dickson was busy gazing at the motor cars he noticed so carefully. But if not, then Curran got away by some other means,—by a window or back door or somehow. He had to get away,—and he did get away. We must accept those facts. Now, it would be interesting to know how he made his exit, but to my mind that is of minor importance compared with the necessity of finding him. We *must* find Curran. If he is innocent and a good friend of my grandfather's, then we want to know it, so we can search for some other suspect. And if he is the criminal, then we surely must get him."

"He's the criminal all right," Fuller declared. "Why, there's nobody else to suspect in the slightest degree. You heard no other person come in——"

"No, and I saw no one else come, until the postman came. And no one could have entered the house by any other door than the front door, since, as Jenks says, one side door was locked and the other one is right near where Dickson was at

work all the time. Well, Fuller, it must have been the Professor, so we must find him."

"Easy enough to say, Mr. Gilray, but what's to be done?"

"Have you seen the Railroad Station people?"

"Yes, sir. They all seem to know the man. He has arrived a few times on a train from New York. He has always gone directly to Mrs. Plum's, and several times they have seen him go back to New York. He usually carries a small suit case, or a medium sized bag. Once he had a man carry the bag for him and it was enormously heavy. The Professor laughed and said it was full of rocks."

"Yes, he is a geologist,—they say he collected specimens in the woods back of this place. That's why I have in my mind his fleeing to the woods to hide. But if he couldn't get out of the house—pshaw, Fuller, he did get out of the house,—so we seem to be at a deadlock. How *are* we going to find him?"

"That's a question I can't answer, sir. We've tried various colleges and Educational Bureaus of Registry,—all that sort of thing, and we can't trace him any way at all."

"Maybe he'll show up of his own accord," Gilray spoke musingly. "I've a queer notion, Fuller, about those last words of my grandfather. You've heard about them?"

"Oh, yes, sir. It was like the old gentleman to protect your name in case of suspicion."

"Yes, but here's my point. My grandfather never would have thought of protecting my name, as you put it, unless he had reason to believe I would be accused. Now, I think the Professor had threatened to implicate me in my grandfather's death, and with that in his mind, the dying man tried to forestall it."

"Very likely, sir, very likely. That would mean that the murderer knew he could make a secret getaway, and he meant the crime should be fastened on you!"

"Something of the sort," Joyce spoke very gravely. "I can't see it all clearly myself, but it must have been some threat or hint from the murderer that made it seem imperative to my grandfather to put in a word toward my defence."

"That makes it look more than ever like Curran's guilt, and, as you say, sir, the thing is to find him, and then we'll find out how he disappeared so mysteriously."

The police left no stone unturned in their search for the missing Professor. They made Mrs. Plum's life a burden by their repeated visits to Curran's room, by their repeated quizzes of herself, her daughter and her boarders.

To her distress, the boarders seemed to like

being quizzed, and as for Miss Poppy, she led the detectives and the reporters a dance by hinting at secret knowledge, which she did not possess, until at last, they began to distrust her evasive stories.

The matter dragged along; the verdict being that of death at the hands of one Professor Curran, whose apprehension was strongly advised.

Burr Winslow talked it over with Joyce.

"It's all very strange," Burr said, musingly. "Don't you think, Joyce, that the fact of the stab wounds being so exactly alike, and no weapon found in either case, seems to link up the murder of that strange girl with the murder of Uncle Mark?"

"It does seem so, Burr," Joyce returned, thoughtfully, "but after we've said that, what have we proved? Only a strange coincidence, it seems to me. For, even supposing the same person committed the two murders that just implicates Curran in the girl's murder——"

"If Curran killed Uncle Mark——" Burr looked doubtful.

"Yes, of course,—if he did. On the other hand, if the girl was killed by some man who brought her here,—as the police assume,—then he may or may not have been the man who killed grandfather. I can't see, Burr, that the shape of the wound being the same, has any

bearing on the case so far as we know now. It may have, of course, but I don't see it at present."

"Nor do I. But it makes the case a very peculiar one,—one that I believe has far more to it than we can see on the surface. I say, Joyce," Burr spoke suddenly, "look me in the eye! Do you know anything more about this business than you have told?"

Gilray met Burr's eyes with a straightforward gaze that became stern and even menacing as he spoke.

"First, I'll answer your question,—no, I do not. Then, I'll ask you one. Do you suspect me of having had a hand in my grandfather's death, or why do you seem to doubt my honor and honesty?"

Burr looked at him and spoke slowly.

"No, I don't suspect you of killing my uncle, but I will tell you as I have told you before, I don't quite understand you. You seem to me like a man with a secret,—a man with something to hide."

Winslow said this without a trace of diffidence, without a hint of embarrassment, speaking as casually as if he were mentioning the merest trifle.

Gilray sighed. "I have, Burr, but you know all about it. Yet it bothers me a lot, that past

life of mine with the Movie people. Just think, seven years I lived with them. Seven years of Bohemian, sometimes questionable acquaintances and surroundings. Do you wonder it troubles me? When I meet pleasant, correct people, and then remember the scenes I've lived through, I do feel like a man with something to hide,—like a man with a secret. I'm glad you spoke of it, though, Burr. For it makes me realize that I show it. I don't want to wear my past life on my sleeve. Tell me, how does it seem apparent?"

"Oh, pshaw, Joyce, I didn't mean that at all. Is that all you have on your conscience?"

Gilray stared at him and his eyes grew stormy.

"Are you hunting for trouble, Burr? Do you want to quarrel with me? Or fight? I'll tell you right now, I won't stand your innuendoes. If you've anything to say, come right out and say it! What do you think I have on my conscience? The killing of that girl and the murder of my grandfather?"

"Oh, no, no! Lord, no!" and Burr looked shocked. "Good Heavens, Joyce, how can you say such things?"

"Don't try to turn the tables that way," Joyce looked straight at the other, "tell me what you have been implying,—what you mean by your insinuations. Speak out, now!"

The glitter in his eyes and the ring of command in his voice stirred Burr to action and he said,

“This is what I mean, then, I don’t believe you are really Joyce Gilray.”

“Oh, that’s it, is it?” and the laugh that accompanied the words was one of relief. “I’ve been looking for a repetition of that sort of thing from you. I’ll admit you’ve taken your deposition like a man, you’ve been nice to me and accepted your removal from power with dignity and proper resignation. But that was when grandfather was here and could stand up for me. Now, he isn’t here, you return to your plan of casting doubts on my personality, in hope, I suppose, of benefiting yourself thereby.”

“I have always had doubts,” Burr said, gravely.

“Then, all I can say is, keep your doubts to yourself,—or, prove me in the wrong. I have no responsibility in the matter. I came here with full proofs and credentials. With all my mother’s papers and belongings and with memories of her and of my father that were incontrovertible evidence of my good faith and veracity. These things satisfied my grandfather and his lawyers. They proved sufficient to instal me as his grandson and his heir. That is all past history. It is an accomplished fact. If you can disprove it, it

is up to you to do so. I understand, Burr," the speaker's voice softened, "how you feel about it. I know how galling it must be to have an apparent outsider come in and take what you had learned to look upon as your place. Especially an outsider whose unfortunate circumstances in the past had made him not quite—shall we say, to the manner born? I understand all that, I say, and for that reason, I shall not take up this quarrel with you,—though I dare say I ought. For I'm not going to stand any more of it, Burr. If you have any proofs of my falsity, if you can show wherein I have deceived my grandfather, or anybody else, go ahead and do so, otherwise, don't refer to it. You'll have to put up or shut up, or—I'll know the reason why."

"You have the whip hand, Joyce. You have the inside track,—and yet——"

"That's what I won't stand for! None of that 'and yet'! Now, if we're to get along together at all,—you and I,—and it is surely to your advantage that we should, you'll have to change your attitude. But, while we're on this subject, I'll tell you one thing. I am Joyce Gilray,—the real Joyce Gilray. Get that in your head. But, it is possible that another claimant may appear. No, I won't tell you any more, for the other claimant may never appear. But if such a thing should happen, remember I warned you of the

possibility, and remember that I am the real grandchild of Mark Winslow, the real and only child of his daughter Helen and the man she eloped with. That's all," and Gilray's lips set in a firm line, and his whole manner was so grave and stern, that Burr, though he looked at him wonderingly, said no more on the subject.

"Now, as to this matter of Professor Curran," Gilray took up the conversation, after a short pause, "let's decide it together. Do you think we should let the thing drop or can you think of any further means to use in tracking him down?"

Burr Winslow hesitated only a moment. He was a little inclined to get up and walk out of his cousin's house, but he reconsidered and concluded to stay.

"You know, Joyce," he said, slowly, "my idea is like Uncle Mark's was, if you go into a thing don't stop short of the very best means to your desired end."

"Meaning what, exactly?" said Gilray, looking a little blank.

"Meaning that if we want to find Curran,—and we do, don't we?"

"You bet we do! The very worst way!"

"Then why not go straight to the one man we know of who can find him?"

"Who?"

“Lorimer Lane, the detective Uncle Mark wanted to get to look into the matter of that girl——”

“I know. But Uncle Mark gave up the idea of getting Lane.”

“Why did he?”

“I don’t know, I’m sure. He just dropped the whole subject. You know how averse grandfather was to attending to any unpleasant business.”

“Yes, I know, but he was keen for Lane at one time.”

“He certainly was. Well, Burr, if you think it wise to get Lane on this thing, I’m willing to do it. Lord knows, I want to know who killed Granfer, and have him get his just deserts. If he’s the same man who killed that poor girl, then that mystery will be solved also. Though I can’t think that just because each was stabbed with a knife, the murderer was identical. But that’s neither here nor there. I never felt much personal interest in the girl’s death, but I do in Granfer’s and I’m ready to engage Lorimer Lane or anybody else you recommend to dig into the mystery. I’ll foot the bills,—but, I say, Burr, I don’t want the man staying here. It isn’t that I’m inhospitable, and of course, there’s plenty of room in this big house,—and I’m in New York a lot, I know,—but, all the same, I’d rather pay

his board somewhere in the vicinity—what do you think?”

“Oh, I’m sure that would be all right. I don’t believe he’d expect to stay here, and I’m not sure he’d want to. Let him stay at Mrs. Plum’s.”

“Why not the Inn? It would suit a man better, I should say, than that boarding-house.”

“All right, he can suit himself. Will you write for him to come?”

“Yes, I’ll write to-night. And then, Burr, you can put him on my trail, too, and see if he can prove to your satisfaction that I’m not my grandfather’s grandson.”

Winslow looked up with a sudden flush, but he only said, gravely, “You dare me to do that?”

“What a word! As if we were schoolboys giving and taking a ‘dare’! But if the great sleuth can prove I’m not Joyce Gilray, I’ll most certainly step down and out. I’m not at all afraid, however,—but I do want you to feel satisfied.”

“I think I do, Joyce. Your attitude just now goes far to prove my faith in you, and if I’ve misjudged you, I ask your pardon.”

“No, Burr, that won’t do. If I’m a wrong ’un, you’ve no call to ask my pardon,—and, if you’ve misjudged me to that extent,—it’s too big an offense to pardon.”

"You're right, Joyce, you're perfectly right," and Burr Winslow went home wondering if his regret at losing his uncle's favor had so warped his whole nature as to make him unduly suspicious of his cousin's rights therein.

Only two days later, Lorimer Lane arrived.

He went first to the Winslow house and was received by Gilray, who offered to give him the history of the case.

"Unless you'd prefer to have the police version," Gilray said.

"Are they different?" Lane asked. He was a man of middle age, with quiet, reserved manner and a pleasant smile.

"Not that I know of," Joyce assured him, thinking as he looked at the detective that he didn't seem very shrewd, whatever he might prove to be.

"How did your grandfather come to drop that other matter—the murdered girl?" Lane asked, as they sat down in the library for their chat.

"The truth is, my grandfather never liked to discuss unpleasant subjects or think about unpleasant matters. He did think at first that he wanted you to come here and delve into the mystery, but as the time went by, and nothing further turned up, he sort of forgot about it,—

or, at least, he ignored it, and the matter dropped."

"I see. Well, now for this new mystery. But,—if it is painful for you, Mr. Gilray,—let us call in somebody else to help. For I must know all the details before I can get to work at all."

"No, Mr. Lane, I'll tell you myself. It is painful, of course, but it is the one of the few things I can do for my grandfather, and I want to do my best."

Whereupon, Gilray gave the detective a detailed account of the happenings of the afternoon of Mark Winslow's death.

He had a most interested auditor, and was often interrupted in his narrative by the questions the detective wished to put.

"Your suspicions have never turned toward Dickson?" Lane asked, as Joyce came to the end of his tale.

"Why, no," and there was utter astonishment in the tone. "Nobody ever thought of such a thing."

"Well, don't mention it to any one. Doubtless it isn't so at all. Only, you see, I thought the man had opportunity——"

"But no motive! What motive could Dickson possibly have had for killing my grandfather?"

"We don't know what motive Curran had—

or anybody else. But, don't take that suggestion too seriously, Mr. Gilray. A newcomer on the case, as I am, must get his bearings before being able to place his suspicions justly at all."

"But surely you suspect Curran, Mr. Lane?"

"Why, yes, he is certainly a suspicious character. You've not been able to locate him?"

"No, I told you that." Joyce began to think the great detective positively stupid. "We can't get a line on him at all,—that's why we think he was some old enemy of my grandfather's who returned here to kill him——"

"And trumped up all this geology business, and took a room at the boarding-house and all that—why didn't he just come and ring the bell as he did,—and accomplish his fell purpose without all that elaborate preparation?"

"I don't know, I'm sure," Joyce looked surprised at the thought. "But there are the facts, now make what you can of them."

"I'd like to stay at that same boarding-house," Lane suggested. "It might be a help you see."

"Do so, if you wish,—but you'd find the Inn more comfortable and more of a popular meeting place for people who might perhaps help you in your work."

"Nobody can help me," said Lane, in a rather lugubrious tone. "I work alone."

"Oh, very well, doubtless Mrs. Plum can give

you a room. I'll send you over in a car. Do you want to go now?"

"Yes, please. And I'll report as soon as I find out anything of consequence."

Lorimer Lane departed, and Joyce Gilray sat for a long time pondering on the probabilities of a man with so little force of personality ever discovering the solution of one of the most mysterious murders ever known.

CHAPTER XIII

THE PLUM BOARDERS

MRS. PLUM willingly took the detective into her hospitable home but she refused to let him occupy the room that she still considered Professor Curran's.

"He might come back any minute," the good lady declared. "And might claim his room,—and then, where'd I be, I'd like to know! I don't say as he's a murderer,—I don't. Nobody has proved it that I can see."

"Very well," Lorimer Lane agreed; "then give me another room, but I must insist on permission to look the Professor's room over, whenever I like,—if he isn't here. And I can assure you positively, Mrs. Plum, he will not return."

"No, I don't suppose he will," she conceded, "but it goes against the grain to use his room before he's given it up."

So Lane was comfortably fixed in an adjoining room, and Poppy flew in and out bringing towels and soap and pins and anything she could think of that would give her an opportunity to become acquainted with the new boarder.

"I'm quite sure, Miss Plum, that I need nothing more," Lane said, at last, as she appeared with a third vase full of flowers.

The flowers were merely some late asters, and spikes of goldenrod, and Poppy arranged and rearranged them as if she were a professional decorator.

"There's no wedding going on, you know," he said, quizzically, as he watched her arduous efforts.

"Well, Mr. Lane, I want your room to look pleasant," and she gave him one of her most elaborately arch smiles.

"Then clear out and let me arrange my own belongings so it will look pleasant to me."

Lane's voice was bantering rather than rude, and Poppy understood and so with a gay little wave of farewell, she left him to his own devices.

But, alone, Lorimer Lane only tossed some brushes and night things out of his bag, and then dropped into the easy chair to think it all over.

"Most interesting case," he told himself, after some cogitation. "No way to look at present, because there are so many ways to look. The Professor is, of course, mixed up in it, but may or may not be a principal. I wonder about that Jenks, now. Is he the trusted old retainer he seems? And the two cousins,—Gilray, and Winslow. They are not entirely at one,—

though that's not surprising, when Joyce came in and took Burr's place. Logic would point to Burr Winslow as the villain, but I can see no reason as yet to suspect him.

"But I do see a connection between the two murders. That is, it seems to me there must be. Not only because the wound in each case was made with a similar instrument and the instrument was not found, but because there's no way to look for the murderer of the girl; nor, except for that elusive Professor, is there any way to look for Mark Winslow's murderer. But the very mystery of the thing makes me think it will be more easy to get at the truth, than if it were apparently simpler."

By which rambling thoughts it may be clearly seen that the great detective hadn't really detected much as yet.

He went down to the dinner table, and was given a seat between the landlady and her daughter.

This at once proved his status in Mrs. Plum's eyes and the other boarders began to speculate as to whether she could acquire the detective for a son-in-law.

Lane, however, was in blissful ignorance of the possible meaning of his seat of honor, and beamed pleasantly round on all as he made some light and general conversation.

But no one was content with this, and in a short time, the whole company were talking of the Winslow case and begging the detective to tell them all he thought or surmised on the subject.

Lane was sufficiently master of the fine art of evasion to satisfy their demands yet at the same time give them no information whatever, and he encouraged talk on the matter, but absorbed far more data than he gave out.

The boarders were wrong in their assumption that Mrs. Plum had an eye to Poppy's matrimonial chances with Lorimer Lane. Her plans were far deeper and her hopes far higher than that. Moreover, though she knew Lane was unmarried, she didn't know anything about his friends or home or fortune.

And there was another man of whose prospects she knew a great deal.

This was Joyce Gilray himself. For a long time she had wished she could bring about a meeting between her daughter and the heir of the Winslow estates, but this she could see no way of doing.

One of her boarders, Sam Robbins, knew Burr Winslow, but this rather roundabout path had not as yet proved available. Now, she began to think that there might be a possible chance, through the great detective, of getting in touch

with Joyce Gilray, and, the prideful mother felt, that if he could once see her beautiful Poppy, at her best, he must instantly capitulate.

But this all required diplomacy and patience, so, for the moment, Mrs. Plum was devoting her energies to making her new guest feel at home, and bringing about friendly relations between him and Poppy.

Though no words had passed on the subject, Poppy was not entirely unaware of her mother's maneuvers, and not at all averse to doing her own share in the campaign.

She, therefore, played a frank and friendly rôle with Lorimer Lane, adding a dash of archness by her side remarks, in chaffing vein to Robbins, who was her abject slave at all times.

Robbins sat at a side table—the one where the Professor had been domiciled—and though he could talk across, he hadn't the privileges of the main table.

Yet Lane mentally picked him out as a mine of information, and determined that as soon as he could he would question him.

"How long will it take you to find the murderer of Mr. Winslow, Mr. Lane?" piped up a lively, pink-faced young chap who sat opposite.

"That will depend on his own cleverness," Lane returned, easily. "If he is tricky and sharp-witted he may give me a long chase, but

if he is absent-minded or forgetful, he may leave traces that I can follow up at once."

"How thrilling!" exclaimed Poppy, rolling her eyes at Lane. "And Professor Curran was absent-minded——"

"I don't think he was," Sam Robbins protested, "I'd say he was only pretending to be absent-minded. You see, he sat at this table, and you can tell a lot about a fellow who's eating——"

"Nonsense!" Poppy tossed her head, "you're not so cute, Sam, that you can distinguish between real and pretended absent-mindedness! Why, you're awfully absent-minded yourself!"

There was a general laugh at this, but Sam Robbins stuck to his guns. "That's just why," he claimed. "I *am* absent-minded—a little,—and that's why I know the real thing when I see it! I say, Mr. Lane, do you really think you can find out who that Professor was—or is? He's nobody's fool, I can tell you that much!"

"Of course I can find him," Lane spoke in a careless tone. "Anybody can find anybody else, if he looks hard enough. No one can hide so that he can't be found by somebody."

This rather foolish speech provoked many foolish answers, and Lane egged on the talk, hoping that in all the chaff he might find a grain of wheat.

"I suppose you wouldn't tell a scrap of anything you've discovered so far," Poppy challenged him, at last. "I know detectives keep secret anything they find out."

"I don't," Lane said, with an air of surprise. "Why should I? I'm quite ready to tell all I've learned regarding Professor Curran. And it's only that he is disguised. Whoever he is and whatever he looks like, he is not an elderly geologist at all."

"I knew it,—I knew it!" Poppy fairly screamed in excitement, "I knew it, Mr. Lane, because once—once, he shaved!"

"Ah, did he?" and Lane turned quickly to her. "You're sure?"

"Yes, I'm sure,—I take care of his room, and one day there were bits of shaving papers in his waste basket——"

"Then he *is* absent-minded. He never left them there but once?"

"No, only once." Poppy and Lane were now facing each other and talking earnestly. They seemed to have forgotten the others; they seemed oblivious to the fact that the subjects they discussed were not conventional table talk, they were bent on proving the old professor was not wearing a natural beard of his own.

"Pshaw! I'd have sworn those were home-grown whiskers," Robbins declared. "Do you

mean to say, Poppy, that was a boughten beard?"

"Of course it was,—though it was certainly a good one——"

"It was indeed," Robbins agreed, and others voiced assent.

"And there's your absent-mindedness!" Robbins went on, triumphantly, "always remembering not to shave so's it'd be noticed,—and then, one time, thinking of something else, slipping up—what say, Mr. Lane?"

"I say you're right, and since we've proved a false beard, we can assume other disguise. I daresay he is a younger man than he seems, but I doubt if he did anything else very especial to make him look old. The grayish whiskers and a dash of powder on his hair,—or, perhaps a wig,—and of course, he wore big glasses, with horn or shell rims——"

Chorus of, "Yes, he did!"

"Well, with a different type of clothing, no more disguise than that would be needed to transform any one's appearance beyond recognition."

"Then it was some old enemy of Mark Winslow's——"

"Or the son of some old enemy," another surmised.

"Or a paid gunman——"

"Or any representative of somebody who wanted Mr. Winslow put out of the way."

"Why representative?" Lane asked, interested in these impulsive guesses.

"Because he's a young man," Poppy said, quickly.

"Not necessarily," Lane argued. "He may be clean shaven and yet be really old. Perhaps his gray hair is rightfully gray, and his glasses are a necessity."

"I don't see that it matters," Robbins said, "we know he is disguised, now does that help to find him, or not, Mr. Lane?"

"Not, probably. Surely it would be easier to look for a man whose appearance we know than one we don't. But it helps to know that the Professor is disguised, for now the one type we don't have to look for is the bewhiskered, scholarly gentleman. Your Professor may really be a dapper dandyish sort, clean shaven and clear-eyed."

But when dinner was over, Lane took Poppy and Sam Robbins and the three went to the room the Professor had used.

"I felt sure those whiskers were false," Lane said, carrying on his trend of thought. "And the fact that they were good ones proves that we have a clever impostor to deal with. You're a good girl, Poppy, to note that shaving business

and remember it. And you, Mr. Robbins, have quick and original ideas. So, I'll ask you both to help me all you can."

Greatly flattered at his words, the two young people expressed willingness to aid in any way they could.

"All you can do," the detective said to Poppy, "is to watch out for any further mail or message that comes for Curran. I doubt if there'll be any, I think that having accomplished his fell purpose, he has departed for good and all. You see, the thing resolves itself into a simple sequence of events. The enemy of Mark Winslow, preparing to kill him, either came himself or sent an emissary to Willowvale. This, of course, was Curran; and he made his home here and came several times by way of establishing himself as a harmless, unobtrusive person. After getting so that he could go in and out unquestioned, he simply made ready, walked over to the Winslow house and killed his man, then disappeared."

"How did he disappear?" asked Robbins, eagerly.

"That's the present mystery,—one of them," Lane said. "But we've made progress, and we'll make more."

"There are lots of ways he could have got away," Poppy said, looking contemptuously at

Robbins. "That butler of Winslow's may not be telling the truth about all the doors being locked. If the side door locks with a spring catch, of course the man could have gone out that way and shut the door behind him. Then it would have locked itself."

"That's so, Poppy," Robbins agreed. "And that door is on the other side of the house from where Dickson was working and also out of range of Joyce Gilray's windows."

"Yes, and that's only one way," Poppy went on. "The man could have slipped into a coat closet or some such place, and then, when Jenks went to the door to see the postman, the man could have slipped out to the back part of the house and out at the kitchen door."

"You're a fairly astute young woman," exclaimed Lane, looking at Poppy, admiringly.

"Oh, pshaw," she said, "I bet you thought of those ways long ago,—and others, too."

As a matter of fact, Lane had, but even her surmise of it, increased his respect for her mentality.

"Now, let's look about this room and see what we see," he suggested. "Suppose we search silently for a few minutes, and then tell what we've found."

Poppy's eyes glistened. This was the sort of game she loved, and it was exhilarating to be at real work with the great detective.

After five minutes, Lane said:

"Well, my children, what have you found? Ladies first. Any discoveries, Miss Poppy?"

"No," and Poppy looked downcast. "At least only one,—and that's a negative one."

"All right, what is it? Out with it!"

"Well, Mr. Lane, it's only this. I've been looking over the letters in the letter rack, and they're all without personal or individual significance. I mean, they're every one circulars, begging letters, advertisements, or things of that sort. Not a letter from a friend or fellow professor, not even a bill, except those from my mother for this room, and they are all duly receipted. Now, it looks to me as if they were all here for show,—I mean for inquisitive persons to look at and,—learn nothing. If there was just one social letter, just one other bill, it wouldn't seem quite so strange."

"Good, Poppy. That's a true note you've struck. It goes to help prove what is rapidly becoming indubitable, that Professor Curran was incognito and in disguise. Anything from you, Mr. Robbins?"

"One thing right in the same line, Mr. Lane. These books on Geology are not very erudite or advanced. While not exactly beginner's handbooks they are not what you'd expect to find on the desk of an expert who made trips up here to

hunt specimens. See, they're practically school text-books."

"Proving that they were selected by one who wanted to appear a geologist, but who was unversed in the literature of the science."

"Exactly that,—don't you agree, Mr. Lane?"

"I do. Especially as the leaves turned down in these books—as if the student had pored over them—are really turned down at random. See, here is one turned up from the bottom, as if to mark a special paragraph, yet on this whole page is nothing worthy of note—it is an unusually commonplace dissertation on quartz. Well, we're obliged to believe the Professor wore his geological lore as falsely as he wore his whiskers."

"What did you find, Mr. Lane?" Poppy asked, interestedly.

"Right in line with your own findings. I noticed the dressing-gown and slippers. Look at them! Gown of big-flowered delaine! And carpet slippers! Now, such things used to be associated with elderly and scholarly men, but not nowadays. Such garments haven't been seen in use for years. Yet these are comparatively new,—bought recently. Doesn't it look as if the man who owned them desired greatly to play the part of an old mossback professor, and that he mistakenly thought these were a necessary part of the paraphernalia?"

"That makes him out an older man than I had in mind," Robbins said quickly. "A young man wouldn't know about those things,—I didn't."

"Whoever knew, knew wrong," Lane said, positively, as he hung the gaudy gown back in the wardrobe and set the slippers inside, too. "On the stage you know, they still represent the old minister or professor as wearing these things, but they don't really do it any more. Well, young folks, you've helped me a bit, and entertained me a lot. Now, I think, we'll call it a day."

"What have you learned?" Poppy asked, coming nearer the detective, and smiling up at him bewitchingly.

But Lane was proof against such blatant blandishments and stepped away from her, as he answered:

"One thing, positively. That Professor Curran was not Professor Curran at all,—in name, personality or profession."

"And who was he?" Robbins asked breathlessly.

"That's our next job,—to find that out," said Lane, a bit seriously.

For Lorimer Lane was a serious detective. His demeanor before the two young people was not at all like the air he assumed when, a few

moments later, he sat in his own room and studied deeply over the matter.

"If I could only have been here sooner," he thought regretfully. "Now, every trail is cold, every trace obliterated,—or nearly. Well, I've a lot to go on,—and I've more than a lot to learn! Circumstances are of the strangest,—but the people are stranger still. Those two cousins, now. Well, of course, they're not exactly cousins, but distant connections. There's no love lost between them,—yet Gilray seems kindly disposed toward Burr Winslow. And Lord knows, it's not surprising if Winslow is sore on Joyce! Coming out of the nowhere and grabbing all his present glories and future hopes! I'd feel sore at that myself! Guess I'll go to see Gilray and have a word of chat."

Telephoning to make sure he was at home, Lane was soon in Joyce Gilray's presence.

The young man was a cordial and hospitable host, and when they were comfortably smoking, he said, "Now, then, Mr. Lane, anything of importance to tell me?"

"Some. This, for one thing. The murderer of your uncle is a man well under middle age, about average height, and above average intelligence. He is smooth shaven and alert minded, except in rare moments when he is absent-minded."

"A geologist?" and Joyce smiled a little.

"Knows about as much geology as I do, which is a mere smattering."

"But I felt sure it was the Professor who killed him!" and Gilray looked his amazement.

"But I said, clean shaven——"

"I know,—but I always felt that that Professor might have worn a false beard as a disguise. You see, Mr. Lane, I'm pretty much of the opinion that it was an old-time enemy of my grandfather who came here that day and killed him. So what more probable than that the man was more or less disguised?"

"But surely a false beard wouldn't disguise a man utterly."

"It would go far toward doing so. A slight disguise is often even more effective than an elaborate one."

"Yes, that's so, and it may be you're right. But would it not follow that the professorial attitude was also assumed and that the man had no more scientific learning than he had beard?"

"Of course that may well be so, but how did you discover that?"

"Only an assumption, Mr. Gilray, because the text-books in his room at Mrs. Plum's are so simple as to be almost elementary. They're books for the lay reader rather than the professor. However, that's a minor point. The thing is to

find the man. I don't care what he is when not disguised, I don't care what his scientific attainments are, I must find him and I'm going to do so. And to that end I ask your help."

"Willingly, Mr. Lane, in any way you suggest. What can I do first?"

"Give me full swing in this library, among your grandfather's papers—especially old papers. If this is the result of a long ago feud or early quarrel, it may well be that some reference to it can be found in old letters."

"Yes," Joyce spoke thoughtfully. "And I can't think of any reason why you should be denied access to any and all of my grandfather's papers. Yet I think I may ask to be present, myself, when you look over them, for to tell you the truth, that's a job I haven't tackled myself yet. I've meant to get at it,—but it's a sad thing to do—however, maybe Mr. Brett will help us out. Yes, that will fix it,—let Mr. Brett, he's my lawyer, go over the papers with you. Then he can lay aside anything that requires my definite attention and you can spot anything that bears on your research work."

"That will do nicely, Mr. Gilray. Also, I want a talk with your servants,—some of them."

"Of course,—all that sort of thing, whenever you like. Now, Mr. Lane, can you give me any idea of your plans,—I mean aside from this

necessary questioning and so forth? Have you any theory as yet,—granting that the murderer was the make-believe professor and that he was an old-time enemy of my grandfather's?"

"Well, Mr. Gilray, that is about as far as I've gone,—but remember I've not been at work long."

"I should say you hadn't! Forgive me for my thoughtless speech. You see, it seems years to me since my grandfather met his fate,—and I can't realize how short a time it really is."

"Then, since you ask me as to plans, and that, I'll say that my methods, though simple, are not quite like the regular detective's ways. Often, as you know, they are extremely secretive and talk to no one about what they're doing or trying to do. I, on the contrary, talk to everybody I can find, who may know anything about the matter. I question them all, and get them to talk, and out of a day's chatter, I may find one or two helpful points. It seems to you, doubtless, a strange and unnecessary mode of procedure, but I assure you it has proved most successful, in my experience."

"All right, Mr. Lane, pursue your usual methods, by all means, and count on my help whenever you can use it."

And after further desultory discussion of the same matters, Lane went home and sat up half the night thinking things out.

CHAPTER XIV

DOUBTS

PURSUANT of his plan for getting all the general information he could, Lane started off the next morning to call on Burr Winslow. But the young man was over at the Mark Winslow house, and Lane was about to depart when Molly Winslow appeared.

"Stay and talk to me," she said, engagingly. "You're the great detective, aren't you? Perhaps I can help you in some way."

"I'd be glad of help, Mrs. Winslow," Lane returned, and his air of gratitude was flattering. When the detective chose to make himself agreeable, his manner was delightfully ingratiating.

The two sat in the pleasant morning room, and Lane, by occasional hints or questions, drew his hostess on to give him a deal of useful information.

And Molly needed little encouragement. She was bitterly angry at Joyce Gilray for coming into the family and spoiling the chances of her

own son. Burr would now be the heir of Mark Winslow and the inheritor of the estate, but for that upstart intruder.

"Yet, he's the grandson, while Mr. Burr Winslow is but a nephew," Lane reminded her.

"He says he is—" Molly's hesitation was dramatic.

"There's no doubt of it, is there?" Lane's manner gave no hint of his interest in this question. He had thought of investigating the validity of Gilray's claims, and here was a chance to start the ball rolling.

"N—no, I suppose not. He satisfied his grandfather and the lawyers. No, there's no chance of his being other than he pretends,—but I wish—I wish there was such a chance. My heavens, Mr. Lane,—if we could prove that man an impostor——"

"Are you merely voicing your wishes, or have you the least reason to think him a fraud?" Lane asked, for he took small stock in the excited woman's arguments.

"Well,—I'll tell you this. There is no definite reason that I know of to suspect Joyce of trickery,—and yet —" Molly hesitated, for Burr had forbidden her to hint at these things. "Oh, well, I suppose he's all right," she concluded, lamely.

"You know something, Mrs. Winslow,"

Lane said, with a wheedlesome smile. "Now, don't you think you'd better tell me what it is,—for I'm out for the truth, and if your knowledge is true——"

"I don't know that it is—" Molly hesitated, for though always inclined to garrulity, she yet had a wholesome fear of Burr's displeasure.

And at this point, Burr himself walked in.

"Hello, Mr. Lane," he said, "you are Mr. Lane,—aren't you?"

"Yes, Mr. Winslow," and the detective rose as Molly made more formal presentation of her son.

"I'm just over from my cousin's," Burr went on. "He's looking for you over there, I think."

"Yes, I'm going. I stopped here to see you, Mr. Winslow. I like to feel acquainted with all the members of the family. I've had a little chat with your mother, and, if you don't mind, I'd like to ask a few questions of you."

"Go ahead," Burr said, taking a chair, and offering Lane his cigarette case.

"First of all," the detective began, "have you the slightest reason to think Mr. Gilray is not the grandson of Mark Winslow?"

"My mother has been chattering," Burr said, calmly, and Molly began to deny it.

"No, I haven't," she cried. "I——"

"Never mind, Mrs. Winslow," Lane inter-

rupted her, "this matter is too serious to bother about trifles. Mr. Winslow, if there's the least doubt as to the identity of Joyce Gilray, I want to know it——"

"Mr. Lane," Burr spoke carefully, "I have no real reason to think there is the slightest doubt that Joyce Gilray is just what he represents himself to be,—the son of Helen Gilray, Mark Winslow's daughter. He brought many papers and documents, all of which satisfied Mr. Winslow and his lawyer, Martin Barry, a clever and astute man. Yet, later,—well, I don't know exactly what happened, but Barry must have raised some sort of a doubt or question, for my Uncle Mark discharged him, summarily, and replaced him by a man named Brett. This man is now lawyer for my cousin Joyce, and has, I am sure, no doubts of Joyce's integrity. I am quite ready to admit, Mr. Lane, that it may well be my own chagrin and regret at being myself put out of my previous position in my Uncle's heart and home, that makes me *want* to think Joyce does not belong there."

"I've known you less than a half hour, Mr. Winslow," Lane spoke deliberately, "but I've sized you up pretty well. At least I know you are naturally truthful and honest. Therefore, I put it to you,—do you think Joyce Gilray *is* the grandson of Mr. Winslow?"

Burr hesitated, and Lane saw that he was trying to speak the exact truth.

"It's so hard to say," was the reply, at last. "I can't say I don't think it,—and yet, there are moments when I feel a doubt. But, if I must answer, then—yes, I believe he is the real grandson of my uncle, and I believe I should never have had even the shadow of a doubt, were it not for my own disappointment and regret at being turned down."

It had cost Burr an effort to acknowledge this, and Lane noted the relief that came to the young man after the speech was over.

"You are honest!" he declared, looking admiringly at Burr.

"I cannot deceive myself," Burr returned, and his quiet voice gave more the effect of thinking aloud than of talking to another. "I've always been like that. Of course, I couldn't deceive anybody else,—I mean I wouldn't, my sense of honor would prevent me,—but, also, I find it difficult to deceive myself. If I think a thing out, I can generally see that the temptation to deceive one's self is at the root of most false thinking. I doubt if I am making myself very clear,—but I know what I mean."

"I know what you mean, too," Lane said, seriously. "And it shows deeper insight and truer frankness than most men possess. How-

ever, since you are so frank, I take it, then, that you really believe Joyce Gilray is all he pretends to be."

"Yes, I do," Burr said, doggedly, though Molly wrung her hands in despair, and would have spoken but for her son's admonitory glances.

Despairingly, she thought to herself, he was throwing away a good opportunity to cast doubt on Joyce's claims, and perhaps the doubt could be turned to advantage. But she dared not voice this sort of thing while Burr looked at her so forbiddingly, and she sat silent.

"If I can be of any help to you," Burr said, for Lane was rising to leave, "but Joyce tells me that you prefer to work alone."

"I work alone," Lane said, "but that doesn't mean that I can't be helped. I get all I can in the way of information from any one I meet. Then the actual work, which is, of course, the sifting and weighing of all I have learned, I do alone. My ways and means are not at all mysterious or even subtle. My methods are only the use of observation and common sense. They may not prove successful in this case. I don't mind saying that it looks pretty complicated at present. But I've often found that a complex puzzle resolves itself into parts, and that not infrequently these parts are easy of solution and their answers throw light on the whole."

"That's interesting," Burr said, "maybe I can help you on some of the parts, then. If so, let me know."

"I certainly will," Lane promised, and as he said goodbye, Molly Winslow found opportunity to give him a knowing glance and a wink of promise that said, as plainly as words could, that she, too, could help him on some of the parts.

Being impressed, at the moment, with Burr's honesty of purpose, Lane felt slight interest in the offer of the self-prejudiced woman, but he stored away in his memory the unspoken offer of Molly Winslow.

It was some time later before he went to the Mark Winslow home, where being shown into the library, he began in earnest to investigate the mystery of the millionaire's death.

"I have the history of the case from various sources," he said to Gilray, in the abrupt way that was characteristic of him when very much in earnest. "I have the viewpoint of several people,—interesting, but not illuminative. Now, I want a short interview with you and with some of your servants,—then, I shall be equipped for my work."

"You sound very businesslike, Mr. Lane," Gilray smiled at him; "and I'm glad to have you meet my lawyer, Mr. Brett."

The man he introduced to Lane was a sharp-

featured, keen-looking man not much older than Gilray himself. But it was a young face that showed knowledge and wisdom beyond its years, and Lane looked curiously at the alert lawyer.

"You two," he said, "can quickly tell me all I want to know about Mr. Winslow's financial affairs. Not that this would seem to have much bearing on the crime, but there may be a connection after all."

So for half an hour the lawyer and the new master of the Winslow fortunes went over lists of investments and securities, until Lane was entirely conversant with the holdings of the estate.

"Now," he said, "next, I'll ask for the papers and letters which you brought, Mr. Gilray, by way of establishing your identity here. Or did your grandfather consider his recognition of you as his grandson sufficient guaranty?"

"Both had weight with him," Joyce returned; "you see, Mr. Lane, there was no one to be satisfied except my grandfather, and he required no more than his natural and intuitive certainty that I was his grandson. However, I did bring a satchel full of my mother's papers and letters, which are at your disposal if you want to see them."

"I do want to see them, Mr. Gilray, but not now. It is not likely they have any bearing on

the matter in hand, and I think that first of all we must turn our attention to the strange disappearance of the mysterious Professor Curran. You never heard your grandfather mention him, I think you told me last night."

"No, I never did."

"Yet Mr. Winslow must have known him, for he greeted him pleasantly when the butler admitted him."

"Yes, that is true. It seems to me that for that very reason, we must conclude the professor was not disguised, but was really an old acquaintance of my grandfather's."

"But, you see, we've pretty well settled it that the professor was disguised, for Miss Poppy tells me that he shaved while staying at the Plum boarding-house. Now, as I've heard Curran described, his wilderness of whiskers precluded all idea of shaving——"

"It certainly did!" Gilray smiled. "I never saw the man, except as I noticed him crossing the lawn that afternoon. But even from my window I noticed the luxuriant beard he flaunted."

"Then,—and Miss Poppy certainly displayed great shrewdness to notice it,—it must have been a false beard, for he is known to have shaved, at least, upon one occasion."

"That indicates a false beard and therefore a

disguise," Gilray declared. "Does that make it easier for you to find him, Mr. Lane?"

"I shall find him easily enough," Lane said, carelessly, "that isn't what's bothering me. And I shall learn why he killed his old friend, Mark Winslow,—for they must have been seeming friends for Mr. Winslow to have greeted him cordially."

"As I see it," the lawyer Brett put in, "Mark Winslow greeted his visitor as a stranger, whom he had heard of, and didn't know it was an old acquaintance until after they were alone together."

"And then the visitor disclosed his identity and killed him?"

"Yes," Brett assented. "Isn't that plausible?"

"Perfectly. And extremely probable. But, as I say, we'll get the professor in due season, we'll learn his motive then or before. Now, what I'm after is to learn why the professor also killed that poor, unknown girl, and right here on the Winslow doorstep."

Joyce looked his surprise.

"Then you're one of those who assume that because the fatal wounds are of similar shape, the two crimes were committed by the same person?"

"Yes," Lane said, with a positive air, "I am."

“And Professor Curran killed the girl as well as murdered Mr. Winslow!” exclaimed Brett, astounded.

“Yes, I think so.”

“There’s no evidence for or against it,” Brett said, speaking slowly, “no positive evidence, I mean. You see, the matter of the girl was not very deeply looked into. The victim was unknown and apparently friendless, and the police, after a half-hearted effort to find the murderer, let the case drop.”

“I was asked by Mr. Winslow to come and look into that matter,” Lane informed his hearers, and then, later on he wrote he didn’t want me. You remember, Mr. Gilray? You wrote the letter advising me not to come.”

“Yes,” Joyce nodded, “I remember. I wrote it at my grandfather’s command. He concluded it would bring him a lot of unpleasant notoriety, and he was always disinclined for that sort of thing.”

“And he didn’t feel it his duty to serve the ends of justice——”

“No; grandfather wasn’t strong on his civic duties. He was,—if I may put it so,—inclined to the line of least resistance, when it came to anything of a public nature. He hated publicity, and to see his name in the papers enraged him beyond endurance. So, he decided to drop the

matter since no one seemed to object to his doing so. Had the police actually held him responsible in any way or in the slightest degree, he would have taken the necessary steps at once. But, why do you say that the professor must have killed the girl, Mr. Lane? It puts a new face on the whole matter to my mind. I can conceive of an old acquaintance of my grandfather's being so inimical and revengeful because of some old wrong, that he came here and killed him,—but to think of his also killing that strange woman, and here, at my grandfather's house,—it seems too much of a coincidence."

"But it may be that it is just the coincidence that explains both murders," argued the detective. "And, mind you, I don't say it is,—I don't say the old professor killed the girl, but I do believe the crimes are in some way connected."

"It may be," said Brett, "but I can't see it. Of course, if the make-believe professor is a young man, masquerading as an old man, there would be more chance of his having killed the girl,—but why is a young man here to kill old Mr. Winslow?"

"Oh, that doesn't present any insuperable difficulties," Lane said, gazing calmly at the young lawyer's face. "Of course, if it had been, say, a family feud, such as were not unknown

even fifty years ago, the father may have passed on the task of revenge to his son——”

“Sort of vendetta?” and Joyce gave the detective a quizzical smile. I don’t doubt your superior knowledge on these subjects, Mr. Lane, but it does seem incredible to think of a vendetta directed at my mild mannered, publicity dreading grandfather. Yet, I admit, I don’t know of any other reason for his death. I’m sure of this: there never was anything in grandfather’s life wrong or shady enough to bring about blackmail or anything of that sort. And yet, that is almost easier of belief than your vendetta theory. It’s all utterly incomprehensible!”

Gilray threw out his hands with a helpless, hopeless gesture, and Lane hastened to reassure him.

“That’s what I’m here for, Mr. Gilray. Don’t worry yourself unduly until I have had a try at it. I may fail, I may have to give up the task,—but, if so, it will be the first time I have failed.”

“Is that so? Have you invariably been successful, Mr. Lane?”

It was Brett who asked this, in genuine surprise at such a record.

“I have always succeeded so far, Mr. Brett,” Lane returned, speaking gravely, “but I do not plume myself on the fact, for I have not taken

up very many cases. I am not a professional detective, but a private one, and I take only such cases as interest me, and—to a certain degree—such as I think I can solve.”

“Then if it seems too much for you, you don’t tackle it,—is that it?” the lawyer’s tone was a trifle sneering.

“That’s it, exactly, Mr. Brett,” and Lane nodded. “To attempt something I feared I couldn’t put across would be unfair to my client as well as to myself,—don’t you think so?”

“I do,” and Joyce Gilray spoke decidedly. “I think that’s the right attitude, Mr. Lane. And I not only hope but feel sure you’ll discover my grandfather’s murderer and bring him to justice. If he proves to be also the man who killed that unfortunate stranger, then so much the better for the cause of justice. But the case of Mark Winslow is the one that interests me.”

“And me, too,” Lane declared. “Now, Mr. Gilray, if you’ve nothing more to tell me, and I don’t think you have, I’ll go for a bit of a talk with Jenks. And, too, I suppose I may have the run of the house? I want to go to your room, and sit where you sat when you saw the old professor come in at the gate. May I trot round by myself?”

“Yes, indeed. Do whatever you like, Mr. Lane. If you want Jenks or the housekeeper, or

me,—just say the word. Or if you want to go it alone, why, do so.”

“Very well,—I’ll report later,—if any.”

“Wait a minute,” and Gilray looked as if uncertain whether or not to say something that was quite apparently in his mind.

“What is it?” and Lane looked encouragingly at him; “better say anything you have to say.”

“Well, it’s such a foolish bit of business,—and yet, I think I’d better tell you. Sit down again,—for a minute.”

Lane sat down, and after a moment’s hesitation, Gilray gave his head a toss, and smiled.

“It’s only a trifle, but to hesitate about it gives it an appearance of importance. So I’ll just tell you in the fewest possible words, that I have reason to think another claimant may appear for the rights to the Winslow succession.”

“Another claimant!” Lane repeated, as if incredulous.

“Yes; I know it’s absurd, and will be merely a farce,—if indeed it ever comes about at all. But I’ve had one or two letters——”

“Addressed to you?”

“No, to my grandfather,—but of course, I open all his mail. I did, when he was alive.”

“Oh, of course,—I wasn’t questioning your rights. I only want to get the hang of this new claimant.”

“And I don’t want to tell you about it. It may be necessary,—but, if not,—don’t you see, Mr. Lane, that it’s just a bluff somebody is trying to throw,—and, if I can tackle it myself, and beat it,—I’d rather do it. If not, I’ll be mighty glad to call on you for help. I’m only mentioning it to you, so that, if it comes to the point, you’ll know I was looking for it.”

“I see. All right, Mr. Gilray, with your lawyer here, I’ve not the slightest doubt you can handle the matter of false claimants,—one or a dozen!”

“I’m sure we can,” and Brett smiled at the detective, who now rose again to go on his quest.

Lane gave little thought or concern to the matter that Gilray had just mentioned to him. If an impostor appeared to claim the Winslow heritage it was not a detective’s affair, unless, indeed, he were called in to investigate the new claim. And there had been no hint of that, so Lane felt no responsibility in that direction.

But as to the murder case or cases, he felt a grave burden upon him. Moreover, his usual methods seemed not to fit the present circumstances. Usually a murder mystery offered several possible suspects, and meant successive investigations. Here there was but one suspect,—the elusive, evasive professor.

Lane no longer thought of Professor Curran as

an old man. Poppy's assertion that he had shaved clinched the certainty that the professor was a smooth shaven man in disguise. Maybe old and maybe young, but positively not bearded.

Now to see if Jenks could throw any further light on the man's personal appearance.

Except for the boarders at Mrs. Plum's, Jenks was the only person who was known to have seen the professor at close range. Gilray saw him from an upper window, and Dickson, only casually, across a wide stretch of lawn.

To the butler's pantry Lane then made his way, and found Jenks there alone.

The man was quite ready to talk, indeed, it seemed to Lane he must have been waiting for an opportunity.

"They never ask me anything," he said, in an aggrieved tone. "Those police,—they're so cocky, they know it all! Never strikes 'em I could tell 'em something!"

"It's all the same, Jenks, tell it to me." Lane put on his most encouraging smile. "In fact it is wiser to tell me and me only," a judicious lowering of his voice and a quick glance over his shoulder gave an impression of the desirability of secrecy, which Lane saw at once would appeal to the butler's imagination.

And it did, for, assuming there was mystery

to be maintained, Jenks dropped his own voice to a whisper and began.

“Well, you see, Mr. Lane, I don’t know anything about Mr. Winslow’s murder, any more’n I’ve told. But as to that young woman, now—ah, I could tell a bit about her.”

Lane purposely looked disappointed, though in truth he was eager to hear more.

“Well, tell what you know,” he said, looking closely at Jenks.

“I’ve seen her before,” the butler said, slowly. “Leastways I haven’t exactly *seen* her,—but _____”

“Well, out with it,—what have you seen?”

“I’ve seen her picture——”

Lane laughed aloud. “Seen her picture! Who hasn’t? Why, man, it was in all the papers.”

“No sir,—I don’t mean that way. I mean, sir, I’ve seen her in the—the Moving Pictures.”

CHAPTER XV

A NEWCOMER

"AT the Moving Pictures!" Lane was disappointed in earnest now. "That's nothing—everybody goes to the Movies. But where was it,—where did you see her?"

"Not *at* the Movies, Mr. Lane,—but *in* 'em. On the screen, you know."

Just then the doorbell rang, and though it was not his business to open the door, yet Jenks was supposed to hover in the background in case he might be wanted.

So he stepped into the hall, listening, and Lane followed.

They heard what was evidently the voice of a young woman, and she asked for Mr. Winslow.

"Mr. Burr Winslow?" said the maid who was at the door, "he doesn't live here."

"No, not Mr. Burr Winslow, but Mr. Mark Winslow," the stranger's voice went on, and Jenks looked inquiringly at the detective.

"I'll speak to her," said Lane, quickly, and hastened to the door.

"You're looking for Mr. Mark Winslow?"

he said to the girl on the porch, "come in, please."

He dismissed the maid with a peremptory nod, and taking the girl's arm led her into a small reception room and closed the door behind them.

"May I ask your name?" Lane said, politely, as he drew a chair for her.

The girl looked frightened, tears sprang to her eyes and she trembled as she said,

"Who are you? and why may I not see Mr. Winslow?"

"You do not know, then, that Mr. Mark Winslow is—dead?"

It seemed to Lane the better plan to speak frankly and quickly, for they were liable to be interrupted at any minute, and he was exceedingly interested in this stranger.

"Dead!" she repeated the word in a whisper, and her eyes took on a blank, unseeing look.

"When—when did he die?"

"About a fortnight ago—did you not read of it in the papers?"

"No,—I've not seen any papers for—for a long time. Then—who is in—in charge? Can I see Mr. Burr Winslow?"

"He doesn't live here,—not in this house. He lives in Willowvale—but perhaps you'd like to see the present head of the house,—Mr. Gilray——"

“Who?”

“Joyce Gilray—the grandson of Mark Winslow——”

Lane ceased speaking suddenly, for the girl had risen and her deep set eyes were flashing with determination.

“What are you talking about? I am Joyce Gilray, the child of Helen Winslow, Mark’s daughter——”

“You are! Can you substantiate your statement?”

“To the proper authorities,—yes.”

There was no quiver in her voice now, no trembling, no appearance of fright. She had a firm hold on herself, and her nerves were under perfect control.

“Then,—it seems to me the proper authorities are Mr. Gilray and his lawyer, and as they are at present in the library, across the hall,—will you see them?”

“Yes,—surely. Now?”

“Now,” assented Lane, and rising, he opened the door, and led the way to the library.

His tap brought an invitation to enter, and with a deep enjoyment of the impending dramatic situation, he opened the library door and ushered the girl inside.

Carefully closing the door behind him, Lane awaited the first spoken words.

They came from the girl, and they were merely, "Tom Pinney!"

"Yes," Gilray said, looking at her pleasantly, but without enthusiasm. "Miss Ward, isn't it?"

"Lora Ward, as you knew me, but really Joyce Gilray,—as no one knows so well as yourself."

Gilray's face took on a look of deep concern.

"Look here," he said, as he gazed at her intently, "where have you been since the accident——"

"In the hospital, until just now." Her face was white, and her eyes seemed to blaze with a strange, fierce anger, yet she said little.

"They told me you were killed," Gilray went on, still staring at her.

"It was so reported,—I had a fearful fracture—oh, I can't bear to think of it! And I had brain fever and amnesia and Lord knows what all! But I'm all right now——"

"You can't be all right, Miss Ward, if you claim to be Joyce Gilray."

"But I am—and you know I am!" She grew hysterical now, and Gilray turned to Lane.

"You see how it is, Mr. Lane. Miss Ward is not fit to be without a nurse's care. I can explain all about this hallucination that she is Joyce Gilray,—I understand it perfectly,—but ought we not to look after her welfare first?"

"I'll attend to my own welfare, thank you," the spirited young visitor declared. "Now, Mr. Tom Pinney, if you can explain why you are here in my place and under my name, I'll be glad to hear what you have to say."

"Very well, Miss Ward, then, since you ask it, I'll tell, in the presence of Mr. Brett, my lawyer, and Mr. Lane the well-known detective, the whole story of our acquaintance,—shall I?"

"Yes," and the word was snapped out as if in utter exasperation.

"Then, here it is, in as few words as possible," Gilray began.

"Mr. Brett knows, and I assume Mr. Lane knows, that I spent seven years in the business of the Moving Pictures. Part of the time I was merely a sort of assistant, and later I took part in the pictures, toward the last achieving a fairly good reputation as an athletic and specialty actor. My grandfather knew this, and though it displeased him, he overlooked it and the matter was referred to as seldom as possible while he was alive.

"I had given up the profession and was about to start for the East,—I had been living in California,—when I came across my grandfather's advertisement asking me to come to him. It gave me the greatest pleasure to do so and I started at once for New York.

“On the train, I met several pleasant people with whom I became well acquainted, as one does on a transcontinental trip. Among the young people was Miss Lora Ward,”—he bowed to the girl, with a slight smile.

“There were other young ladies, but if I may be allowed to say it, I liked Miss Ward the best of the lot, and we became good friends. I think Miss Ward will corroborate the statement that we were together for the better part of two or three afternoons. We had long talks and told one another of our past lives and of our future plans and hopes. I was full of glad anticipations of my new-found good fortune, and—here is the point, Brett, I told Miss Ward frankly and fully of all the circumstances of my position. She was good enough to be extremely interested, and I not only told her the whole story but I showed her the letters and papers of my mother’s that I had with me. I even showed her the letter from my grandfather, in which he asked me if I were a girl or a young man. And Miss Ward quite appreciated the joke that I had played on grandfather by refusing to tell him my sex until I arrived. You see, I knew he would rather welcome a grandson than a granddaughter, so I played what seems to me now a silly jest, but at the time I thought it a good one.”

“You are lying!” Lora Ward exclaimed,

“there’s not a word of truth in all that! I am Joyce Gilray—I have always been Joyce Gilray—how dare you make up all that string of falsehoods——”

She stopped from sheer exhaustion and excitement. Her face was white, her great eyes dark and stormy. Her hands were nervously twisting themselves around her gloves, which were drawn and strained in her clutch.

Gilray regarded her solicitously.

“May I not put you in the care of my housekeeper, Miss Ward?” he said, “and I will continue my story to these capable and wise judges, who will hear later what you have to say?”

“No, you may do nothing of the sort!” she flashed back, controlling herself by a supreme effort. “Go on, and finish, and then I will tell my side of the matter.”

“Very well,” as she seemed quieter, Joyce went on. “As I was saying, I told Miss Ward everything about my early life, and my anticipated future. She rejoiced with me in the thought of finding again my home and relatives. I told her all about Burr and Molly and everything I could think of. I was so full of the whole thing myself, and she was so sympathetic and cordially interested that I babbled on by the hour.

“Then came the disaster. We were sitting

together, Miss Ward, Miss Phelps, and myself, when the—the accident occurred. I remember only a terrific jolt and crash, and then I knew nothing more until I awoke forty-eight hours later in a hospital bed.

“They kept me there a day or two after that, and then I was allowed to continue my journey. I lost all my luggage except one suitcase of clothing and the small satchel of my mother’s which I had, unconsciously, grasped and clung to, at the time of the crash. That is my story,—there is no more to add that you do not already know. I came here, my grandfather recognised me as his own kin and I maintain my position. I accuse Miss Ward of being a pretender,—by the way, Miss Ward, did you think I was killed?”

“They told me you were,” she said, in a whisper, her eyes fixed, staring, on his face.

“Ah, you see,” Gilray gave his old, crooked smile. “Miss Ward, thinking me dead, conceived this ingenious plan of personating Joyce Gilray. She remembered that my grandfather did not know my sex, and she hoped to put it over as his granddaughter! The scheme was not a bad one, and had I been killed, as she was told, it would most likely have succeeded.”

“You have no papers,—no proofs?” Brett asked her.

The lawyer looked rather coldly at the girl. He did not believe in her at all, but he was not entirely unimpressed by her helpless, desolate air. She seemed irresolute,—uncertain whether to press her cause or give it up as a failure. On the whole she wore the air of one utterly surprised,—bewildered,—at the turn things had taken.

Of course, Brett reasoned, she had supposed Gilray dead, and had thought the only difficulty would be to establish her own claims. Now she found she had that to do, and in addition must prove Gilray the impostor.

Lorimer Lane looked on in silence.

The situation interested him intensely, but as he had not been called on for his opinion or advice, he said nothing. Mentally, he was weighing the evidence and eagerly awaited the girl's further explanation.

"Of course, I have no proofs?" she cried, angrily. "He stole my satchel,—my mother's satchel, that held all the papers and letters——"

"Now, Miss Ward," Joyce spoke quietly, but decidedly, "I must protest. I'm willing to make all due allowance for you, remembering you have had brain fever and amnesia and are doubtless still in an irresponsible state mentally. I dare-say during these past weeks you have been lying in the hospital thinking out this plan, and have

perfected it to your liking. Also, I give you the credit of thinking that since, as you were told, I was killed in the wreck, no harm would be done to any one by your impersonation of Helen Gilray's child. I give you the credit of believing that if you had known I escaped with my life you would never have tried this thing. But I did escape, and I am here, alive and well, so I can only now assume that you will withdraw your absurd claims and give up your scheme."

"Aren't you Tom Pinney?" she asked, her eyes fairly burning with excitement. "Aren't you, or weren't you, the movie actor, famous for lariat-throwing and Western films?"

"Yes, that's who I am. But I am also Joyce Gilray, and that is my real name. Tom Pinney was assumed for the stage only. My grandfather knew all about that. He hated the memory of it, and tried to forget it. And I believe he did so, for Granfer had a conveniently short memory for anything he didn't wish to remember."

"Indeed!" suddenly this strange girl seemed imbued with a new mood. She gave Gilray a sarcastic smile, and then, turning to Brett, said, "You're the Winslow lawyer?"

"Yes," he said, rather taken aback at the sudden appeal to him.

"I mean," she went on, quietly, "were you Mr. Mark Winslow's lawyer?"

"I was, Miss Ward," he returned, coldly courteous of speech, "at the time of Mr. Winslow's death?"

"How long had you been his lawyer? I mean, were you here at the advent of—Tom Pinney?"

The slight pause before the name was accompanied by that little smile of hers that seemed to annoy the lawyer, but mightily pleased the detective.

Lane couldn't believe this girl was honest in her claim, but he gave her the benefit of believing that the whole plan was the result of her disordered brain and unbalanced mental condition consequent upon her illness.

Also, with his usual determination to learn anything he could of possible bearing on his case, he listened for further developments.

And they came.

"No," Brett informed her, "I was not here when Mr. Gilray arrived, but I was soon after that employed by Mr. Winslow, and I am now in full charge of legal affairs here. So, Miss Ward, if you have any claims to make or any grievance to state, I am the one to hear it."

"Very well," she was calm and self-possessed now, "then I state that I am Joyce Gilray, and I claim my rights."

"Accepting your speech at its face value," Brett said, in his most dignified legal manner, "I ask you for proofs or further statements to substantiate your somewhat extraordinary claim."

"Proofs I cannot give you—as yet—but I will ask attention to my story."

Three graver or more attentive auditors could not have been imagined and the girl began.

She had thrown her maltreated gloves to the floor, she had laid her little handbag on a table, and with her hands lightly clasped on her lap, she began, in a quiet, monotonous voice.

"I am Joyce Gilray, the daughter of Helen Winslow and her husband Joyce Gilray. My mother's second husband was named Ward, and she preferred to call me by that name. Also, as her second husband objected to the name Joyce, because it was the name of her first husband, my mother called me Lora. Therefore, I grew up with the name of Lora Ward."

"I'm sorry to interrupt," Gilray put in, firmly, "but I want to say that the second husband of Helen Gilray was named Ward, and to my mind, that is one of the points that made Miss Ward undertake this daring scheme. When I first learned her name on the train, I asked her of her family, and found there was no known connection between her and my mother's second husband's people."

"That is not the truth," said Lora Ward, excitedly. "I must ask to be allowed to tell my story without interruptions."

"I can't see, Miss Ward," Brett said, judicially, "why you should bar interruptions. You must remember you are making these statements,—on you rests the burden of proof. I cannot agree that you shall not be interrupted by pertinent questions or comments."

"Is everybody against me?" she cried, looking piteously about. "Will no one take my part?"

"I will do so," Lane said, "so far as it seems to me to be the truth. At any rate, I promise to see that you have fair play."

"No one refuses her that," Brett said, quickly.

"By no means," Gilray added. "I am anxious for Miss Ward to have fair play and a respectful hearing. I ask only that her story be judged by these two wise and fair-minded gentlemen. I'm sure that she herself cannot demand more than that."

"I do," and Miss Ward spoke decidedly. "I demand a lawyer of my own,—one who can look out for my interests——"

"Oh, come now, Miss Ward," and Gilray spoke kindly, "don't engage a lawyer until you have some case for him. Your interests, if you have any, are quite safe in the hands of Mr. Brett or Mr. Lane,—either or both. Anyway tell your

story, and if you need a lawyer, they will advise you to get one."

Both Brett and Lane smiled their acquiescence and Lora Ward, though not seeming quite contented, resumed her tale.

"Mr. Pinney's story of the train meeting between him and myself and of the train wreck is all true," she stated, "but it is he who is the impostor, and not I. I am Joyce Gilray,—as I told you. I saw the advertisement that my grandfather put in the magazine and I answered it."

"When was this?" Brett inquired.

"Oh, long ago—about—about—" she passed her hand across her forehead, with a dazed, uncertain air.

"Don't try too hard to think, Miss Ward," said Joyce, and his tone was honestly solicitous. "You're too recently out from under medical care to tax your brain too heavily. Never mind dates,—they can come later. Go on in your own way."

Lora Ward flashed him a glance of gratitude, and proceeded quietly.

"Anyway, I answered my grandfather's advertisement and I had a letter from him and he asked me if I was a girl or a young man. And I thought it would be a good joke not to tell him until he saw me,—so I—so I—where was I—where was I?"

The girl's eyes grew vacant-looking and her face went gray.

"This won't do," Lorimer Lane said, decidedly. "Whoever she is, this young lady is not fit for this ordeal. She ought to be——"

"Not at all! I'm all right!" Lora Ward insisted. "Excuse me if I'm a little confused—it's all so different from what I thought it would be—I didn't know Mr.—Mr. Pinney would be here——"

"And you thought you could put it over without opposition," Brett said. "Now, Mr. Gilray, if you'd give Miss Ward a glass of wine, say, and a biscuit, I daresay it would pick her up a little, and I think if possible, we want to hear the rest of this extraordinary story as soon as may be."

"Yes, yes," and from a cupboard, Joyce brought a decanter of sherry and a biscuit jar.

Eagerly, it seemed, the girl partook of a few sips of the wine and nibbled at the edge of a biscuit.

"Well," she went on, a little feverishly, but in low, even tones, "then I took the train for New York and on board I became acquainted with Mr. Pinney. I knew him at once because I had seen him in the Moving Pictures and we scraped acquaintance. I was glad to know him for he was gay and merry and we soon formed

quite a little circle of friends. But Mr. Pinney and I frequently chatted alone,—and I told him,—he didn't tell me!—of the advertisement of Mr. Winslow and of my answer to it."

"And you had the bag of tricks?" asked Brett, watching her closely.

"What—what do you mean?" again Miss Ward showed fear.

"I mean you had the old bag that contained the letters and papers of Helen Gilray?"

"Oh, of course I did! It was my mother's bag——"

"Describe it."

"It was about so long," she measured with her unsteady hands, "and it was a dark purple or plum color,—a little faded."

"Good Lord, Brett, that doesn't mean anything," Gilray exclaimed; "of course she saw the bag, in my possession! I showed it to her, and all its contents—like a fool! But who would have supposed a sweet innocent looking girl would trump up this deep laid plot against me! I can only understand it by remembering her long illness from which, it's plain to be seen, she has not yet recovered."

"Go on, Miss Ward," Lane said, commandingly.

"That's all," she returned, dully. "I had the bag, I showed Mr. Pinney the letters and all, and

I told him all about my hopes and plans. Then, we were sitting together, Miss Phelps, Mr. Pinney and I, when the awful crash came. I know nothing more. I was picked up for dead, and it was more than a week before I was conscious at all. And then only at intervals. I was critically ill for a month, and since then I've been convalescing."

"Where?" asked Brett.

"In a small private hospital in Kansas City. The big hospital was full and I was sent away."

"But as to the time of the accident, Miss Ward," Lane said, "where were you—you three?"

"We were in Mr. Pinney's section. We were sitting there because it was the shady side of the car. We were waiting for Miss Ray, and then we were going to have a game of Bridge."

Gilray nodded at this reminiscence, and Lane went on:

"Where was the old bag, then?"

"I had it," Joyce spoke up. "We were in my seats and I never let the bag out of my immediate vicinity. It was on the floor between my feet. I always kept it there."

Lora Ward stared at him.

"No," she said, "that is not so. The bag was there, on the floor, but it was in my possession,—in my charge——"

"You had brought it in with you from your own sleeping-car section?" Lane asked.

"Yes, I always carried it with me."

Gilray shrugged his shoulders.

"You must take these statements for what you consider them worth," he said. "Of course, Mr. Lane, you don't know me as well as Mr. Brett does, but even judging as a disinterested observer, I fancy you see the weight of evidence in favor of my story rather than Miss Ward's."

"You have nothing at all to substantiate your claim, Miss Ward?" Lane asked.

"Nothing material," she replied, "except—this." Reaching for her handbag, she produced a cross of amethyst set in old, carved silver.

"By Jove!" Gilray cried. "She had that made! I showed her my mother's cross,—and she has contrived to get a duplicate somewhere!"

"Very well," and the girl turned to him, her eyes blazing, "if you're the rightful Joyce Gilray, tell me this,—what is, or where is, the Fourteenth Key?"

CHAPTER XVI

CLASHING CLAIMS

FROM Gilray's blank countenance, it was plain to be seen he did not know anything about a fourteenth key, whatever it meant or signified.

He said so frankly.

"I never heard of any key in connection with these matters," he said; "and," he added, turning to Brett, "I doubt if Miss Ward did, either. I think she is making up now, to try to trap me."

"What is the Fourteenth Key, Miss Ward?" Lane asked this, with a friendly smile at the girl.

But she looked crestfallen.

"I don't know," she replied, dully. "I hoped Mr. Pinney knew——"

"Look here, Miss Ward," Gilray said, "I must ask you not to call me Pinney. I used that only as a stage name; my grandfather disliked the sound of it, and I have discarded it entirely. Please speak to me as Mr. Gilray."

His manner was courteous but cold, and his face was grave as he asked this concession.

Lora Ward hesitated a moment, then she said,

"I *will* call you Gilray until I can prove my own claim to the name and then I shall ask you to choose some other for yourself. For I shall prove this," she declared, turning to look at Lorimer Lane, and ignoring both Gilray and Brett. "If you will help me, Mr. Lane, all right. If you are against me, and on the side of this—this pretender," her eyes shot fire at Joyce, "why, then, I shall work out my own case, or get some other advocate."

"It isn't a question of taking sides, Miss Ward," Lane answered her; "I shall merely try to learn the truth about this very strange mix-up. As I see it now, you and Mr. Gilray traveled together on the train for several days. Assuming that one of you is Mark Winslow's grandchild, we must further assume that that one told the other the whole story of the answered advertisement, the bag of papers and the amethyst cross. Then came the railroad wreck and you both escaped with your lives. But,—and here's a point,—each of you thought the other was killed. Therefore,—as one of you must necessarily be a fraud,—you can't both be telling the truth,—it would seem that the fraud was planned, believing the rightful heir dead."

Lora Ward looked bewildered. It seemed as if

she had been unable to follow this logical deduction from the known facts.

But Gilray nodded his head in acquiescence.

“Exactly right, Mr. Lane,” he said. “We can’t both be telling the truth,—we can’t both be the missing grandchild of Mark Winslow, so one of us is necessarily a fraud. And, naturally, the statements of either of us must be suspected,—or, at any rate, must be proved. I recall to your attention the fact that my grandfather investigated my claims and was entirely satisfied as to my identity. As he is not here to pass on the claims of Miss Ward, they must be judged by some other authority. So, all I can say is, get any judges you like, ask any people you choose to decide the case, but let it be decided on its merits. I can’t recommend the judges, for I am an interested party. But I do ask to be represented by my lawyer, and my grandfather’s lawyer, Mr. Brett here, and Miss Ward may have any assistance or authority she can procure. I am quite content to have my claims stand or fall at the decision of competent and disinterested judges. All I ask is fair play.”

“That’s all I ask!” and Lora Ward’s eyes flashed at the speaker. “But how can I get fair play when nobody here knows me—nobody believes in me—I have no chance to prove my case.”

"So far," Lane said, thoughtfully, "this isn't a 'case.' Nobody is bringing legal action,—it hasn't as yet assumed any such proportions. But it is a question to be decided by evidence and proof. It seems to me, Miss Ward, that you are the aggressive party, and you must substantiate your statements in some decisive way if they are to have any weight. If you can prove to some responsible lawyer that you have grounds for your claims then he can take the necessary steps to put you in your rightful place. If not,—I'm afraid your airy structure will fall to the floor."

"But I have no material evidence—Mr. Gilray hadn't either——"

"He has his mother's papers," Brett said, quickly.

"*My mother's papers!*" the girl cried. "He stole them from me——"

"Now, look here," Gilray spoke quietly but firmly, "I'm not going to stand that sort of talk. You are here, Miss Ward, to claim your right to my place. I deny your claim. Now, unless you can bring some authority that I cannot repudiate, I must ask you to cease annoying me. I will meet any valid argument you can bring forth, I will pass upon any evidence you can show, but I refuse to listen longer to the half hysterical harangues of a brain not yet entirely recovered

from a severe injury. I am sorry for you. I felt we had made friends on our train trip, but since you have taken on this new attitude,—since you have given way to this strange vagary,—I cannot, for the sake of my own self-respect, keep up our acquaintance. If you have anything further to communicate on the subject, I must ask you to refer it to my lawyer. It is not only silly, to my mind,—but painful.”

“Very well,” and Lora Ward rose, “I will leave this house, but I am not through with the matter. I shall go to some place in the town where I can stay for a time, and see what steps I shall take next.”

The words were brave enough, but the girl seemed to have lost her earlier energy. She was limp and apathetic. She had all the appearances of a loser in the fight, and not a good loser at that.

With a weary sigh she turned to Lane, and said:

“Perhaps you can direct me to a small, quiet boarding place.”

“Certainly,” he said; “go to Mrs. Plum’s. She usually takes only men to board, but I’m sure, if I ask her, she’ll make an exception in your case. And she has a daughter near your own age. Come with me, Miss Ward,—I’ll take you there at once.”

Gilray and Brett rose as the two went out, and gave courteous farewells.

"I expected her," Joyce said, when they were alone. "I told you I'd had two letters from her. It's a mighty clever scheme, and she's got nerve to try it on. But, you see, it's all the result of her disordered brain. Couldn't you see,—I could,—signs of hysteria and even unbalanced thought? She isn't well yet, and I've small doubt she left the hospital before they wanted her to."

"Hasn't she any people of her own?"

"I don't think so. She was reticent about that sort of thing on the train,—and, of course, I didn't question her. But she struck me as one of these modern girls who are afraid of nothing and dare anything. There's nothing to do, is there, Brett, but await her next move? I've nothing to prove, nothing to substantiate. I've done all that, long ago. If she has anything of importance to bring up, let her do it, and then, we'll see what to do next. Hang it all, Brett, I like the little thing,—she seems so plucky and self-reliant. But that silly obsession——"

"It isn't an obsession," Brett objected, "it's a deep laid plot——"

"Maybe. But I can't help thinking if she hadn't had that brainstorm illness, she never would have tried this thing on. I believe that

as she lay there in the hospital, convalescing, the thought came to her, and she dallied with it, and fussed over it until she couldn't get away from it."

"Yes," said Brett, "I suppose that's what you meant by obsession. The idea took hold on her fancy, and she couldn't shake it off. Well, you've nothing to fear from her——"

"Fear! I should say not! But I'm truly sorry for her, and if she'd let up on her crazy scheme, I'd be glad to know her better and help her if I could. That Fourteenth Key business was funny. Do you suppose she made that up?"

"Read it in a story, more likely. But she had an amethyst cross pretty much like yours."

"Yes; that showed careful and skilful preparation. Proved too, to my mind, the cunning of a disordered brain. But those things are easy enough to come by. I've often seen them in antique shops. They're among the commonest of old-fashioned trinkets. Yes, I distinctly remember showing her my mother's cross, and she examined it closely. Then she must have found one similar in general effect, and had the inscription put on it. She's a smart one!"

Meantime the "smart one" and Lorimer Lane were walking briskly along the main street of Willowvale.

"I left my suitcase at the station," Lora Ward said, "I can send for it, after I'm settled."

She was calm and collected now, she had thrown off all the effects of nervousness or hysteria. Apparently, out from under the influence of Gilray's presence, she had recovered her poise and was ready for whatever came.

"I say," she said, suddenly, "why can't I go to see my cousin Burr?"

Lane stared at her. This assumption of relationship, after all that had passed, was, to say the least, surprising.

"The very thing!" he said, recovering himself quickly. "Let's walk right round there now."

Arriving at their destination they were met first by Molly Winslow.

"Good morning," Lane said, "how do you do, Mrs. Winslow. This young lady is Miss Ward,—Miss Lora Ward."

He stood back, intently watching Molly Winslow to see if she seemed impressed by any resemblance in the young face.

But there was no look of recognition and Molly greeted the girl pleasantly, though with a trace of inquiry in her glance at Lane.

Then Burr appeared and he, too, was introduced.

Of course, he showed no recognition, and at

his polite but impersonal greeting, Lora Ward gave a little cry and said, "Oh, Aunt Molly,—oh, Cousin Burr,—don't you know me? I am Joyce Gilray,—I am the true child of Helen Winslow Gilray!"

Burr stared with amazement, but Molly, always quick of sympathy, said,

"There, there, child,—sit down,—you are ill—Burr, get some water, quick!"

For Lora Ward had staggered to a chair and fairly fell into it.

Molly sat beside her, drawing off her gloves, taking off her hat, and loosening her coat at the throat.

"She is—" began Lane, but Molly interrupted him.

"Never mind who she is,—she's ill, I tell you. I know the symptoms. Why, she ought to be in bed this minute!"

With her arm round the girl, Molly gave her sips of the water Burr brought, and then Miss Ward suddenly sat upright, saying: "I'm all right now. Thank you for your kindness," and she gave a grateful smile at her hostess. "Now, let me make myself clear,—" her red lips came together with a decided air, "I am Joyce Gilray, and that man in my grandfather's house is an impostor. Get that?"

Lane looked at her, curiously. This seemed a

different personality from the one that had made the same statement to Gilray himself.

Burr Winslow still stared at her with that strange air of bewilderment, but Molly quickly grasped her visitor's two hands and gazed into her eyes.

But after a long look, she said, "Maybe you are, my dear, but I can't see the slightest resemblance to Helen Winslow."

"No," the girl replied, "I am the image of my father,—Joyce Gilray."

"What are you talking about?" Burr said suddenly, not roughly, but with a strong note of command. "Tell me what you mean?"

"What I say," she returned, with no trace of fear or embarrassment, and with an effect of assuredness that she had not shown in Gilray's presence.

Lane had an unpleasant sensation that she was playing the siren. This attitude, of course, would have been useless in Gilray's case, but if she could charm Burr and get him on her side, it would be a distinct help.

And for the first time, Lane realized that the girl was beautiful. At the other house she had been so frightened, so browbeaten by the attitude, if not by the words, of both Gilray and Brett, so unable to make good her claim, even in the slightest degree, that it had reacted on her ap-

pearance, and she had given the impression of a scared, beaten, hopeless, half-sick victim of an hysterical obsession.

Now, in possession of her wits and fortified by what were unmistakably admiring glances from both Burr and Molly, the girl revived and regained her habitual demeanor, which was evidently that of a happy good nature.

"I mean just what I say," she repeated, and her smile was at Burr, though quickly transferred to Molly. "*I am* Joyce Gilray,—and I want you"—this time the smile was engagingly coaxing, "to help me prove it."

Burr still refused to commit himself in words, but he came and sat down by the girl and prepared to listen.

Molly, however, was loquacious.

"For Heaven's sake," she began, "how can we help you? I wish you were Joyce Gilray,—Lord knows I'd rather see you there in the old house than Joyce himself—but,—well, explain yourself."

"I will!" and with flashing eyes and indignant frowns, interspersed with bewitching smiles, Lora Ward told her story.

Lane listened intently. He was hearing it for the second time, but he quickly realized it was a very different hearing. The main statements were the same. The whole story of the train

trip and the railroad disaster were told as he had already heard it, except that it was all from Lora Ward's standpoint, without the intervention of Gilray's denials and emendations.

Molly listened, enthralled. Apparently she was all for the girl, and she nodded acquiescence with all her statements whether facts or opinions. Her own desire to talk had given way to her anxiety to hear, and she weighed every point with deepest interest.

Burr, on the other hand, was frankly incredulous.

He had made up his mind that Joyce was the rightful heir, and this new claimant seemed to him too palpably an adventuress to be taken seriously. Moreover, Joyce had told him there might be a fraudulent claim put forward, and it would have to be met.

"Miss Ward," he said, speaking gently, for only a brute could have been harsh with the girl, "what have you in the way of evidence,—of credentials?"

"Only the Truth," she said, solemnly, and her deep violet eyes looked into Burr's with a pathetic melancholy that made Lane anticipate Burr's immediate and entire surrender.

But Winslow held out. Had he not been warned by Gilray, he might have believed in this lovely creature, but after the warning, he felt

sure Miss Ward did not have the Truth to back her.

“But you know, of course, that you can’t come here and demand your rights without some evidence to show that they *are* your rights.”

“He—he stole my evidence—” the rose lips quivered, and the soft eyes filled with unshed tears.

Surely, thought Lane to himself, Winslow will capitulate now!

But Burr was still adamant.

“I don’t get it, Miss Ward,” he said, judicially as a Chief Justice, “you come here and claim a position already filled. You bring no proofs that you are Mark Winslow’s granddaughter, you don’t look like it, you don’t talk like it, and—pardon me,—you don’t act like it.”

“How should I act?” she said, with a pretty glance of humility.

“More like a descendant of the house of Winslow and less like an impertinent adventuress.”

Lane stared his amazement, Molly gave her son a look of deepest reproof, and Lora Ward,—to the surprise of all, laughed outright.

“Since my errand here is so unexpected by everybody, and since, apparently, it is not a welcome one to anybody, I am not baffled or deterred by being repulsed. But, listen to this, Burr Winslow, I am an adventuress until my

claim is admitted, until I am accepted as a descendant of the house of Winslow, and then, I can assure you, I shall behave as becomes my newly acquired dignity." Her rippling little laugh rang out, and her face was positively roguish.

Could this be,—Lane marveled,—the girl who had been crushed and conquered by the words of Joyce Gilray?

Molly Winslow looked up suddenly.

"I believe you are what you claim," she said, though with an air of uncertainty. "That laugh you just gave was like Helen Winslow used to laugh! I never felt as certain as the others did that Joyce is really the heir, and if there's any truth in your story at all,—it must be all true. Anyway, it can't be a hard thing to prove which of you is the true heir——"

"Excuse me, Mrs. Winslow," Lane put in, "it seems to me a very hard thing to prove——"

"Well, I don't care if it is," and Molly shrugged her shoulders, "I've taken a fancy to Miss Ward, and I invite her to stay here with me a few days, at least, and let me nurse her up a bit, and bring back the roses that I am sure belong on her cheeks."

Burr said nothing, but his look of disapproval quite clearly showed that he did not second his mother's invitation.

Lora Ward saw this so plainly, that she said, a little diffidently: "Who is head of the house?"

"I am," said Molly, even as Burr bowed slightly toward his mother, and then Lora seemed satisfied.

"I accept your invitation, gladly and gratefully," she said; "if Mr. Winslow doesn't want me here, I'm sorry,—but I must stay a day or two. It—it suits my plans."

"I'll bet it does!" Lane said to himself, but aloud, he only said, "Then I'll be going along. You won't need a room at Mrs. Plum's, Miss Ward?"

"No thank you, it suits me far better to stay here," and a dazzling smile thanked him and dismissed him at once.

Burr went away with the detective, leaving the two women together.

"What's it all about?" Burr asked, as soon as they were out of earshot of the house. "Where'd she come from? Who is she?"

"You know as much as I do," Lane replied. "She turned up at Gilray's this morning and as I was there at the time, I was right in it."

"I don't believe one word of her yarn," Burr declared. "She's a little beauty and she's a shrewd, clever girl, but she can't put it over. Why she has no proofs whatever,—no papers——"

"But if Gilray stole her papers——"

"Stole your grandmother! No, Mr. Lane, she doesn't ring true."

"Did you ever hear of the Fourteenth Key, Mr. Winslow?"

"Never. What is it the key to?"

"The situation, the little lady pretends. But Gilray never heard of it, and if you didn't, I rather think the girl made it up."

"Guess so. Anyway, I never heard of it. Lord knows I'd be glad if the heirship had been mine, as I had expected, but when I learned it wasn't, I accepted the situation, and I've tried to be friends with Joyce. We haven't hit it off terribly well, but that's more because we're not naturally congenial than because of any real ill-feeling. And having accepted Joyce's right to the place, I don't propose to be a party to his dethronement unless there's some pretty strong proof,—and you say there's none."

"None so far. I don't know what she may dig up yet. But, as she'll be at your home for a few days, you can size her up. Let me know how you feel about it all after a day or two. She can't do anything right away, and I'm so busy with this murder business I can't get mixed up with anything else just now."

"Anything new in the murder evidence?"

"Nothing definite, but several vague hints

and rumors that I have to track down. Where are you going now?"

"Over to see Joyce. I want to know at first hand what he thinks about that girl."

The two parted, and Burr went to the old Winslow house.

He found Gilray expecting him, and Brett was still there.

"I thought you'd come over, Burr," Joyce said. "I want to tell you who blew in here this morning!"

"The new claimant you were looking for," Burr said, smiling.

"Yes! how did you know?"

"She's over at our house now. Mother has adopted her."

"No! You don't mean it!"

"Not literally,—but mother felt sorry for the girl,—she seemed quite ill, and so asked her to remain a few days and be set on her feet again."

"So she worked your mother to that extent!" Gilray smiled. "Well, old chap, how did she strike you? Did you fall for her violet eyes and her rather—er—amazing yarn?"

"No, Joyce, I didn't. I believe it's partly made up and partly a sort of hallucination due to her long illness."

"By Jove, Burr, that's just what I think. So does Brett, here. You see, on the train, I

had told her the story of my affairs,—worse luck that I let myself rattle on so,—and as it was among the last of her recollections before she was knocked senseless in the wreck, it stayed in her brain and worked up into an obsession.”

“Yes, I agree to all that. What are you going to do about it, Joyce?”

“Nothing. *I* don’t have to do anything. If she starts anything I’ll defend my position to the last ditch, but otherwise there’s no step for me to take.”

“No, that’s so. What about the Fourteenth Key? Ever hear of that?”

“Never. A figment of the young lady’s fancy, I suppose.”

“Must be. Well, old chap, your way here is beset with thorns,—I’ll agree to that. Anything I can do—in any connection?”

“No, Burr, nothing that I know of, but it’s good of you to offer.”

CHAPTER XVII

LORA GIVES IT UP

A FEW days went by,—lovely October days, whose crisp air and bright sunshine did their part in restoring the health and strength of Lora Ward. Added to this was Molly Winslow's kind care and attention, and the girl regained her mental balance as well as her physical well-being.

Moreover, her demeanor changed, and from a nervous, uncertain temper, became sweet and sunny. This, however, only when by reason of other distractions she seemed to forget the errand that brought her to Willowvale.

Molly had urged her to forget this for a time, saying that with returning health, she would be better able to cope with its difficulties.

But Molly Winslow, in truth, wanted to study the girl, wanted to discover if, as she hoped, Lora was the true Joyce Gilray, and if, this being so, the usurper could be made to resign.

But try as she would, Molly found little to bolster up her hopes.

And Burr positively declined to agree with her.

"I'll tell you what it is, mother," he said, one night, after Lora had been sent to bed, "you are letting your wishes run away with your judgment. I've looked over this thing from every possible viewpoint and, as you must see, one of the two is a fraud. Now, it can't be Joyce,—he never could have come here and made up a lot of stuff that would fool Uncle Mark."

"Maybe Mark wasn't fooled,—" Molly Winslow said.

"What! Do you mean he was a party to the deception? Well, you *are* biased in Lora's favor——"

"Aren't you, Burr? Own up, now, aren't you more than half in love with the girl?"

"Exactly twice as much as half, mother." Burr looked at her frankly. "And I mean to marry her, if she'll have me. But this matter has to be settled first. I believe Joyce is the real grandchild, and I believe Lora is suffering from a hallucination that is part of her brain fever and amnesia that followed the train wreck. Also, I believe that when she entirely recovers her mental powers,—which she hasn't done yet, by any means,—that she will realize the truth, and that her own past will come back to her."

"You think then, that all this story she tells is fixed in her brain from having heard Joyce tell it to her——"

"Exactly that, mother. And I want to get the best brain specialist in New York to examine her and to treat her case, as soon as she gets a little better physically."

"She's getting better every day——"

"Of course she is. It will all come out right, mother, but don't hurry things too much. As to Uncle Mark's death, I think Lane can take care of that, but I don't for a minute believe Joyce is implicated. However, it would seem that Uncle Mark thought he would be, or why did he say, 'not Joyce,—tell Burr not Joyce!' How could he have thought I'd suspect Joyce!"

"Perhaps he thought the old professor would manage to have Joyce suspected——"

"That's it, mother! I do believe you've struck it! Uncle Mark knew the professor, of course, I've always thought that. Then, as he was dying, Uncle Mark feared the professor would put the blame on Joyce, and he tried with his last breath to prevent it! I'll tell all this to Lane, but, as there's been no breath of suspicion directed toward Joyce, I suppose the old professor, whoever or whatever he is, just concluded to lie low, and make no accusations."

“What became of that old professor, Burr? How did he get away?”

“Slipped out at one of the side doors or windows, I suppose. I don’t put too much faith in Jenks’ assertion that everything was locked up tightly. Why would it be, in the daytime? The various doors and windows over there are locked at night, but I’ve never known them to be carefully secured through the day. But the thing is to find that professor, as he called himself,—I don’t see why Lane can’t do that—if he’s any good at all as a detective.”

“Well, Burr, as you say, Lane and the police can look after the murder mystery. I’m much more interested in the matter of Lora. I’ve come to love that girl like a daughter, and I hope to goodness she will marry you. But I also hope she is the granddaughter of Mark and the rightful heir.”

“She isn’t,” Burr smiled at his mother. “It’s only your wish that makes you even imagine such a possibility.”

“But, Burr, she laughs just as Helen used to——”

“Oh, mother, what an argument!”

“And another thing, Burr, she sets her jaw, when she is determined, for all the world like Mark used to do——”

“Now, mother, don’t be foolish. To say that

Lora's adorable little mouth could possibly look like Uncle Mark's iron jaw—is a little too much?"

"It's true all the same," Molly persisted, and Burr laughed indulgently at her.

But as Lora Ward grew stronger and more composed of manner, so she became more determined to assert her rights to the Winslow inheritance.

"Wait a little," Burr begged her, "you're not well yet, and you can't hold your own in an argument. You can't do yourself justice."

"No," the girl said, with an obstinate nod of her head, "I can't. That's why I want a lawyer, to get justice done for me. I can pay him. I've money enough, and I'm going to have him."

Unknown to the others she had written for Martin Barry to come to see her.

When he came, she greeted him pleasantly, and at once took up the matter in hand.

Burr and Molly were both present, but Lora paid no attention to them.

"Mr. Barry," she said, "I want you to take up this case for me. That is, I want you to hear all I have to say, and then, if you believe in my claims I want you to press them. I don't know the legal terms, but—well, anyway, you'll advise me, won't you?"

Barry willingly agreed to listen, and the two Winslows were also an attentive audience.

But the story Lora told was in no way different from the one she had told in Joyce Gilray's presence, and though Molly was manifestly disappointed, Burr was not at all surprised.

He was positive that the whole thing was an illusion of Lora's brain and that, perhaps only after a long time, she would get over it. He refused to let himself think that it might be a permanent hallucination, and was only waiting for the time when he could get the advice of a brain specialist on the case.

Moreover, as Lora went on and on with her recital, her statements became a trifle vague, she repeated herself now and then, and in many ways showed evidences of a mentality not quite under control.

Barry listened carefully and respectfully. He had reason to do so. But he was disappointed. He had hoped for some positive arguments, some undeniable facts that would lead to a possible consideration of Lora as the real Joyce Gilray.

As he saw no signs of this, he tried to help matters along by saying:

"You see, Miss Ward, I am only too anxious to believe your story. I have hoped for something like this to turn up."

The two Winslows stared in astonishment, and the lawyer went on:

"Yes, I think I am violating no confidence when I say that I am not at all certain that Mark Winslow himself believed implicitly in the identity of his grandson."

"What do you mean, Barry?" Burr asked, very gravely.

"It may be only a notion on my part," Barry weighed his words carefully, "but I always felt that Mr. Winslow accepted young Gilray without sufficient investigation of his claims."

"But Joyce had all the papers and——"

"I know," Barry returned, "but as you remember, I was discharged from Mr. Winslow's service because I cast a doubt on Joyce's identity——"

"I know," Burr said, thoughtfully, "but that doesn't prove anything——"

"No, except this. You see Mr. Winslow wasn't certain—or said he wasn't, whether his grandchild was a boy or a girl. But he wanted a boy,—that I know. So, when Joyce Gilray appeared, Mr. Winslow was so glad and so relieved to find that he was not a girl that he welcomed him with open arms, and with no questions. Had it been a girl who arrived that day, I fancy there would have been far more investigation."

"I know," Molly said, "that Mark wanted a grandson. He would have welcomed a granddaughter with much less enthusiasm,—he said as much to me before Joyce came."

"Also, Uncle Mark told me that he believed Helen's child was a boy," Burr said. "But that's beside the matter. Why can't we find the letters Uncle Mark had from his daughter——"

"The Fourteenth Key—" Lora Ward said, in a strange, faraway sort of voice.

Burr gave his mother a significant glance, and Molly rose and urged the girl gently from the room.

"It's no use, Barry," Burr said to the lawyer. "Miss Ward is not responsible, as you can see for yourself. We're going to put her in charge of a brain specialist, as soon as possible. As to this matter in hand, I think she has mixed up the story Joyce told her, with some book or story she read about the Fourteenth Key, and the two have obsessed her brain."

"It may be," Barry looked thoughtful, "but when she began to talk today she was perfectly rational——"

"She's always rational—it isn't that,—it's this kink in her mind, this hallucination that she is Joyce Gilray—of course you must see that she would never have thought of it at all only that Joyce told her that he hadn't told his grandfather what his sex was, as a sort of joke

on the old man. This, I hold, clung to Lora's memory, and when she was told that Joyce was dead——"

"That's just it, Mr. Winslow," Barry spoke sternly now, "if she hadn't thought Joyce Gilray was dead, she never would have undertaken this imposition. But the fact that she did think him dead, and then tried on the imposture, proves not a disordered mind, but a clever and designing fraud."

"I suppose I ought not to blame you, Barry, for thinking that,—for to you, it must look that way. But, knowing the girl as I do,——"

"And feeling toward her the way you do——" Barry looked knowing.

"Yes," Burr agreed, quietly, "yes, that, too,—I am sure you are mistaken. And, so, I ask of you, Barry, to take over the case as my lawyer,—I will retain you,—and all you need do, is to watch Miss Ward and study her, and then, draw your own conclusions. But not hastily. Take plenty of time."

Barry agreed to this, for though he had spoken in earnest, he was mystified by the girl's actions and wanted to study her further.

In pursuance of his investigation Barry went to see Joyce Gilray. That young man greeted him pleasantly, with no sign of rancor because of past unpleasantness.

“Well, Barry,” he said, “what brings you here? Sit down and have a cigar. Don’t think because I am in my grandfather’s chair, I hold any of his animosities. Indeed, I’d be glad to have you as my legal man, but I seemed to inherit Brett along with the rest of Granfer’s belongings.”

Barry, pleased at this easy opening, fell in with Gilray’s mood, and lighted a cigar as he took the offered seat.

“All right, Gilray,” he said, “I’ll come right to the point, then. I’m rather by way of checking up this strange story the young lady tells, —Miss Ward, you know.”

“Yes, I know,” Joyce spoke shortly. “But I think, Barry, I’ll turn you over to Brett to discuss that. Why should I be bothered with the vagaries of a disordered brain?”

“All right, I’ll see Brett, too. But just answer me a few questions, it can’t bother you much. Let me see your amethyst cross, will you?”

“I would, gladly, but I’ve not the slightest idea where it is. Grandfather took it from me, and kept it. I never saw it again. Also, he took all the papers and things I brought of my mother’s, and where he hid them, I don’t know, but I can’t find them. If you know where to look, I wish to Heaven you’d find them.”

Gilray looked earnestly at Barry, and the

latter glanced about the library, where they sat.

"I've no idea where to look," he returned, "but I do know that your grandfather had a secret hiding place, where he kept old papers. One day I came in here just as he turned away from the mantel, and his angry perturbation made me sure I had almost come upon him as he was closing some secret panel or cupboard. I never mentioned it to him, of course, and I never saw anything of the sort again, but if there is a secret hiding place,—you ought to know of it."

"Of course I ought," said Gilray and he looked around the walls of the old room. "Above the mantel, did you say?"

"I can't say that,—I only say he was turning away from the mantel as I entered.—I say, Gilray, can't the Fourteenth Key open a secret cupboard——"

Gilray laughed. "That fourteenth key is part of that girl's dream," he said. "If there was any such key I'd know it by now. I've all my grandfather's keys, and though they're not numbered consecutively, some of them have numbered tags, and there are two with the number fourteen on. But they open most prosaic places,—one a linen closet on the third floor and the other an unused coat closet in the lower hall. So there goes that hope."

Barry nodded, and the two men stared hard at the mantel and the surrounding walls.

They saw nothing indicative. The walls of the room were not papered but were painted a medium gray, and paneled, each panel being outlined by a narrow Grecian border of gold.

There were but two or three pictures, and one mirror and for the rest the walls were lined with bookshelves or the panels were pierced by a door or window.

"Small chance for a secret cupboard in these walls," Joyce said, as he scanned them anew. "And I've hunted them all over,—I've looked for that secret cupboard ever since grandfather died. I can't find it."

"Did you try over the mantel?"

"Yes, of course," but Joyce rose and passed his hand over the wall in question. "You see, there's nothing like a keyhole, or even a knob or ornament that might conceal one," he declared as they both looked at the plain square of wall space above the old carved wooden mantel. The gray painted surface was smooth and plain, the Greek border outlined it, and in the center of it hung the mirror.

Stepping up on a chair, Joyce lifted the mirror down, but behind it was no break or crack in the wall surface.

"Nothing doing," he said, as he rehung the

mirror. "It isn't dusty, either, for I've hunted that place all over lately. What the fourteenth key may or can unlock, I don't know, but it's quite evidently nothing in this room."

"Yet those papers are in this room, I'm sure," Barry insisted. "And you ought to find them, Gilray, if you expect to substantiate your claims."

The young man stared at him.

"Have you lost your mind, Barry?" he asked. "I've no call to substantiate claims,—that's all past history. Do you suppose for a minute I'm going to pay the slightest attention to this fool girl? Not much I'm not! Her silly imposture wouldn't fool an idiot baby! So, if you're furthering her cause, go right ahead—don't mind me. You won't bother me a bit. But I do want to find that cupboard for other reasons. Not because my position here is uncertain or in danger."

It was at this juncture that Lorimer Lane appeared.

"Good morning," he said, as he was admitted. "You two in cahoots? Will wonders never cease? But don't let me interrupt you, I'm here for a word or two with Jenks. No objections, Mr. Gilray?"

"Not the slightest. Go as far as you like."

Armed with this permission, Lane went to

find Jenks, and took him into the pantry and closed the door.

"Now, Jenks," he said, "talk quickly. I've no time to waste. When I was here a few days ago, you said you had seen in the Moving Picture that young woman who was found dead on the porch here. Where and in what picture did you see her?"

"It was long ago, Mr. Lane, and I don't rightly remember the picture. But it was a name something like 'The Prairie Flower' only that isn't exactly it, either. But something like that."

"How long ago?"

"Like two years, I should say,—maybe not quite so long. But I know it was that same girl."

"Why didn't you tell anybody this?"

"Nobody asked me, and I didn't think it mattered to any one. And to tell you the truth, sir, I was afraid it might get the master into some—some unpleasant scrape——"

"Afraid Mr. Winslow was mixed up with a Moving Picture actress——"

"Yes, sir,—just that. I know it sounds funny—but all the same,—well, I lived with Mr. Winslow a long time—and I knew things about him that no one else did——"

"That will do, Jenks. Don't tell them unless you are asked. Now, keep this matter to your-

self, and rest assured no blot or blur will fall on Mr. Winslow's name through me."

Lane went off and without seeing Gilray again, he started for New York City.

Barry, having learned all he could from Gilray went back to the Winslow home to report.

"It's a sort of deadlock," he said. "Gilray is so frank and fearless, it seems impossible to think of him as other than he claims. Truly, the weight of the evidence is on his side. Yet, this thing bothers me. The joke played on Mark Winslow."

"What do you mean?" asked Burr.

"Only, that it's a girl's trick. I can't imagine a man putting up that silly joke. But if the grandchild was a girl, she would be quite likely to think it funny to keep her grandfather guessing. A man would never think of such a thing."

"I agree to that, in principle," Burr said, "and neither you nor I would do it,—but that doesn't prove that no man would. Besides, Joyce said he did do it——"

"Of course he'd have to say so—whether he did or not!" Barry looked amazed at Burr's stupidity. "I'm trying to turn it into a proof of Miss Ward's claim."

"Oh, I can't think much of her claim," Burr said, wearily. "Here's another thing. You know that first letter Mr. Winslow received

from his grandchild was signed *Joyce Gilray* in a most unmistakable man's hand. Where does that leave Miss Ward?"

"I'll explain that," and Lora Ward walked into the room where the two men were.

Evidently she was feeling better and seemed quite herself. Her cheeks glowed with a natural rose color, and her eyes were both clear and bright.

Burr looked at her solicitously; he knew her symptoms well by now, and he saw she was quite capable of coherent talk, and evidently clear thought.

He was ready for her to explain herself in every possible way, but watchful and ready to take her back to her room if she showed the least sign of a wandering mind.

But it was with an air of complete self possession that she came in and took a chair that Burr placed for her near himself.

"As to the signature," she said, quietly, "I wrote the letter on my own type writer, and was about to sign it, when I had a misgiving that my grandfather would rather have a grandson than a granddaughter. So, I asked a man I knew well, a good friend of mine, to sign my name for me. He did it readily, and never gave the matter another thought. Then, when my grandfather's letter came and asked whether I

was a girl or boy,—I—I felt sure he wanted me to be a boy—a man,—and I signed my name in a queer sort of printing that would pass for either. You see, I—I thought if I could get here, and could talk to my grandfather, he—he wouldn't so much mind my being a girl, and I might make good——”

“Why were you so sure your grandfather wanted you to be a boy?” Barry asked, watching her closely.

Lora Ward hesitated, then she said, slowly:

“For two reasons. One, because on general principles every man wants an heir,—and, too, because my mother had often told me that her father wished she had been a boy.”

The explanation sounded plausible, but it was impaired by the speaker's attitude. She looked fearfully from one to the other of the men as if doubting their belief in her statements. She bit her lip and tears came to her eyes as she looked helplessly at Burr.

With a quick gesture he flung his arm around her, and drew her to himself.

“Never mind, sweetheart,” he said, oblivious of Barry's presence. “It's all right. Don't say anything more.”

“You don't believe me!” she said brokenly, sobbing in Burr's arms. “You d—don't believe me, do you?”

“No,” Barry said, slowly, “we don’t, Miss Ward,—we can’t.”

“Then,” and Lora Ward raised her head from Burr’s shoulder, drew her hand swiftly across her eyes, and with a return of her decided manner, said: “then, I own up—I confess—I am not Mark Winslow’s grandchild at all! I am—I am—” and as Burr drew her closer, she whispered so low that only he could hear her,—“I am only Burr’s sweetheart!”

“Go, please,” said Burr, looking over her shoulder at Barry. And Barry went.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE TRUTH AT LAST

LORIMER LANE had his work cut out for him.

It is not an easy matter to trace up any picture that has not been shown for a year or so, but by visiting several bureaus and many offices, Lane at last found himself on track of a picture called "The Blossom of the Prairie."

By dint of much coaxing and a goodly outlay of money he managed to have the film shown to him, and noted the name of the principal actress in it.

It did not surprise him to see that in general effects she resembled the description of the young woman found dead on the Winslow porch, and though he did not know just where this search was leading him, Lane persevered.

He discovered her name was Maisie Merton and he found out what films she had starred in lately.

One of these, called "Primitive Passions" greatly interested him, and learning where it was to be found, he hastened off to demand a

showing of it. In this he succeeded, and immediately thereafter hurried back to Willowvale.

Here he went at once to his room at Mrs. Plum's and sat a long time alone, thinking things out.

Then he sent for Poppy and asked her a lot of questions about the absent Professor Curran and his habits.

"Yes sir," the girl said, uncertainly as some of the questions were beyond her knowledge, "but Sam would know more about all that than I do. Sam Robbins, you know,—he's home now, Mr. Lane, shall I call him in?"

"Do," said Lane, and then transferred his inquiries to the young man while Poppy listened attentively.

"It's this way, Mr. Robbins," Lane said; "I've been to New York and I think I am on the trail of the man who called himself Professor Curran. Now I want to know some details about his manners and behavior. As we have all agreed I think he's the man who killed old Mr. Winslow, and if so we must find him. Now, try to remember all you can about him. Had he any—you know, any little ways or tricks of personality? Any peculiarity of speech or manners——"

"He hadn't any manners, Mr. Lane," Sam

said, thoughtfully. "Not what I call manners. I mean he was—well, not exactly boorish, but far from refined or conventional in his ways."

"Rough, curt—in conversation?" Lane watched the other closely.

"No, not that. But——"

"Now, look here," Poppy said, "I've no interest in the old professor, goodness knows,—but I do like to see justice done. And I never saw old man Curran except at the table, and then he was across the room, but I'll say his table manners were very good indeed."

"Yes, they were," Robbins assented. "Oh, I know that sounds contradictory, but here's how it was, Mr. Lane. He'd be eating away as pretty as pie, then all of a sudden, he'd do some crude thing,——"

"Eat with his knife?"

"No, not so bad as that, but he'd stick his elbows out, or drink noisily or some such inadmissible thing. And then, he'd be just the other way—why, I've seen him fling his napkin on the table, all crumpled up, instead of folding it, as we have to do in a boarding-house. And he always takes salt on the side of his plate, instead of sprinkling it over his food as the rest of us do."

"Then you mean if that man was in disguise, as I think he may have been, you mean he some-

times was very careful to be correct, and at other times forgot all about that and reverted to his natural careless ways."

"Either that," Robbins returned, "or he was naturally refined, and assumed his boorish manners as his disguise."

"Yes," Lane said, "it may have been either way."

"He was no gentleman," Poppy declared. "Not a real aristocrat,—I can tell you that."

"You can't tell that," Lane reminded her, "if the man was trying to deceive you as to his personality."

"You bet I can!" Poppy insisted. "I guess I've taken care of the rooms in this house long enough to know how a gentleman keeps his room. Nothing special, for a gentleman may be awful untidy in his habits, but it's a different kind of carelessness. Why, I've known a man to make a room look like a whirlwind struck it, just by having a bath, and yet, a man who keeps things quite spick and span may have the crudest ideas about cleanliness—oh, well, it isn't a subject to talk about," the girl flushed a little, but looked very much in earnest, "only I can tell you that old professor was no aristocrat, that he wasn't!"

"Thank you, Miss Plum, you've helped me more than you know. I must find this Curran

and the fuller description of him I can get the better for my search. I think I'll look over his room once more."

Lane went to the room which was still just as the professor left it and carefully noted the books. As he had already learned the scientific books were of an elementary nature, but as he now pored over them he noted how worn and used they were. Leaves were turned down here and there, some at the top of the page and some turned up from the bottom, as if to mark a special paragraph.

The detective scanned these carefully, calling the attention of the others to the worn and soiled volumes, which might easily have been bought at a second-hand book dealer's.

"I can't help feeling that the professor was not a professor," Lane said, frowning at the books. "But I must be sure. If he was, all my theories are wrong. If he was not,—then he was the most meticulously careful fraud I can imagine. See, these notebooks, filled with geological data,—the man must have been a geologist——"

"I don't believe he was," Robbins said, "for one night at the table I asked him a few questions about the origin of the earth and that sort of thing and he was absolutely blank on the subject."

"But that belongs to archæology and biology and lots of things outside of ordinary geology. Old Curran didn't profess to be a modern scientist, did he?"

"No," Poppy said, scornfully, "he was a doddering old thing,—he didn't know anything modern. If I didn't know he shaved I should never have thought of him as being disguised. But why, in the name of common sense would a man shave and then clap on those silly old whiskers?"

"If he murdered Mr. Winslow, that all explains itself, doesn't it?" Lane asked. "And knowing all we do, of his visit at the Winslow house, his mysterious disappearance and the finding of Mr. Winslow's dead body, what can we assume except that Curran was the murderer?"

"Of course he was," Robbins said, thoughtfully, "and of course you'll never see him in Willowvale again.

"Surely not," Lane agreed. "Professor Curran made a successful getaway. I never expect to see him again——"

"You're not going to find him!" Poppy exclaimed, "how did he get away so cleverly?"

"It wasn't so difficult, Miss Plum. You see, nobody knew of Mr. Winslow's death,—I mean at the time he was killed, and the murderer had

ample time to disappear quietly and unnoticed."

"But how did he do it—how did he make his exit?" Poppy looked puzzled.

"There were any number of ways—" Robbins assured her, "that big house has lots of exits, and I don't believe they were as securely fastened as Jenks asserts. You see, anybody could get out, and shut a door behind him, and if it was a spring catch, it would fasten itself."

"And then, you mean, the professor walked away, and went to the station and took a train out of town, without any one seeing him?" the girl looked incredulous.

"Remember, Poppy," Robbins went on, "nobody was interested in the old man then. Nobody suspected him of crime or cared what he did or where he went."

"True enough, Mr. Robbins," Lane said. "Now I've learned all I can here, I'll be running off again. Good-by, for now."

The detective walked rather hurriedly across the town to Burr Winslow's home.

"Well," he said, as he entered, "I've found out who killed your Uncle, Mr. Winslow."

"Professor Curran?"

"Yes, exactly, Professor Curran."

"I can't say that's news," Burr smiled, "but can you get your man?"

"Oh, I think so, later on. Just now, I'm

anxious to settle up this Joyce Gilray question. Did it ever occur to you that Miss Ward is the real Joyce Gilray after all?"

"But she says she isn't," Burr objected.

"Yes, exactly, and that's how I know she is. That, and a few other arguments in her favor. How is she just now? Able to stand some excitement?"

"Oh, I think so,—I'll call her."

Burr left the room and returned with his mother and Lora. The girl seemed calm and happy,—Lane, looking at her closely, decided she was in better health than he had yet seen her.

"Miss Ward," he said, suddenly, "why did you abandon your plan of establishing your identity as Joyce Gilray?"

"For a reason that will doubtless seem foolish to you," she said, speaking very seriously. "But the truth is, Mr. Lane, when I became convinced that my grandfather preferred a man for an heir, and that he had unquestioningly accepted the man I knew as Tom Pinney, and had voluntarily made a will in his favor, I felt conscience stricken at the thought of usurping his place."

"But that is absurd, Miss Ward!" Lane exclaimed, "if you are really the heir——"

"But Mr. Winslow wanted a grandson not a granddaughter,—and too, Mr. Lane, it was too

hard work—whenever I tried, I went all to pieces,—and Burr said——”

“Yes, Lane,” Burr put in, “Miss Ward and I are engaged to be married, and I fear for her to carry the fight any further. It always breaks her all up, and we’d rather live quietly and in peace without——”

“But it’s too ridiculous,” Lane declared, “that is, if Miss Ward is the Winslow grandchild—and that is what I propose to find out pretty quick. Miss Ward, can you go through an interview with Mr. Gilray right now? Will you go with me over to the Winslow house——”

“Can Burr go, too?”

“Yes, of course, and Mrs. Winslow,—I want you all.”

The party set off, Lane calling up one or two telephone numbers while the others were putting on their wraps, and reaching the old Winslow home, Lane asked to see Joyce Gilray——

That young man received them in gay spirits, for, as he told them his lawyer had informed him of Miss Ward’s withdrawal from the contest, and there was to be no further dispute of his rights as the Winslow heir.

“But I want to make it up to you in some degree,” he added to Lora, who sat quietly listening to him. “I want to give you——”

“Wait a moment, Mr. Gilray,” Lane said,

"I have a few final questions to put before this matter can be considered entirely settled."

"Oh, you have," and Gilray's jocular manner was tinged with a certain nervousness, "then, if it's serious, I think I'll telephone for my lawyer,—he's entitled to be in on these confabs."

"He surely is," agreed Lane, and he waited while Joyce called Brett to him by telephone.

Meantime Barry had arrived, and there was a suppressed air of excitement about them all.

"Only a few questions," Lane said, quietly, and then he proceeded to fire a perfect volley of interrogation at both Gilray and Lora Ward.

They were mostly regarding the early days of the true Joyce Gilray whichever of the present claimants could rightfully demand that title.

Molly listened in amazement, Burr was solicitous concerning Lora, but Miss Ward herself and Joyce Gilray were both ready with their answers and both were amazingly alike in their statements.

Lane was disappointed,—he had hoped to trip up Joyce Gilray and prove Lora the real grandchild. But, strangely enough, there was no hesitation on the part of either, and to Molly's knowledge the answers they gave were equally true and showed on the part of both equal familiarity with the subject. The questions referred to the appearance of Helen Winslow,

of Joyce Gilray, Senior, of traits and reminiscences of both parents,—and were answered with ease and truth by both girl and man.

Lane was discouraged, he had pinned his faith on Gilray's breaking down during this grilling, and he had much ready to say afterward.

The two lawyers came in, for Lane had telephoned Barry, and they took seats in silence as matters seemed at a deadlock.

And it was then that Lane had, what he afterward referred to as the greatest inspiration of his whole career.

He was gazing into vacancy, wondering whether to accept defeat in this crisis and go on with the rest of his programme or whether to try further to get at the truth, when he spied something. A ray of sunlight coming in at a window suddenly enlightened him as to a great secret.

With renewed enthusiasm, he turned to Lora Ward,

“What do you know about the Fourteenth Key?” he almost shouted.

“Nothing,” she said, wonderingly, “except that I once or twice heard my mother mention it. She merely made casual reference to it, and I've no idea what it may be.”

“And you,” Lane turned to Joyce, “what do you know about it?”

"I know a lot about it," Gilray said. "It is a key that unlocks some of my grandfather's private papers, but I don't know where it is or what box or door it unlocks."

"You don't!" Lane said, speaking now in a low, intense voice, "well, I do!"

Everybody stared, and slowly Lane rose from his chair and walked across the room. He paused in front of the old mantel and looked at the wall above it.

The two lawyers especially watched him narrowly. For both these men had an idea that certain papers were secreted there, but had no notion how to reach them.

Stepping on a chair, Lane began to count with his fingers on the design of a Grecian border that ran all round the over-mantel panel.

"Don't you know," he said as his finger paused at number fourteen, "that this design is called the Greek Key pattern?"

"Of course it is!" cried Burr, and then, pressing on the fourteenth Greek key from the mantel, Lane caused a small door to swing open. The door was the width of the Grecian pattern and of a height the full measure of the border on that side. A very long narrow door, whose presence was indiscernible because it was just exactly covered by the border design and so showed no joint or crack.

And in this narrow cupboard lay a mass of papers.

Joyce Gilray sprang to his feet, screaming, "Don't you dare touch those,—they are mine! Everything in this house is mine—don't dare—"

"Be quiet," Lane admonished him. "If these are rightfully yours no harm will be done them,—if not, you cannot claim them."

The detective drew out a great handful of documents, and found among them the whole lot of papers that Gilray had brought in the old leather bag. Also there were the two letters that Mark Winslow had received, signed Joyce Gilray, and other papers as well.

"Sign your name," Lane commanded, as he thrust paper and pencil before the maddened Gilray.

"I—I can't," the man replied. "Ever since I broke my finger in the wreck, I've not been able to sign my regular autograph."

"Miss Ward," Lane ignored Gilray, "please sign your name—in printed letters. That is," he added, smiling, "print the name of Joyce Gilray."

Lora Ward did so, and in a moment, Lane was comparing it with the printed signature on the letter he held. They were identical, and as the man who called himself by that name made no attempt to write anything, the rest of those

present began to see that he had slight claim to the name he used.

Lane had tossed the whole lot of letters and papers to the two lawyers and they were going over them methodically, now and then nodding their heads and making remarks of surprise and satisfaction.

"Miss Ward, is without doubt the granddaughter of Mark Winslow," Brett said, at last. "I admit I'm surprised, but there is no possible question of the fact."

"I'm not surprised," Barry said, "and I may as well tell you that all along Mr. Winslow was by no means sure that the young man there was his grandson. He had an old letter from his daughter, in which though she spoke of her child merely as baby Joyce, there are other allusions which seem to point to a girl baby. And had Miss Joyce Gilray appeared, the old man would have welcomed her warmly and lovingly. But the man came, and Mr. Winslow had not only no wish but no reason to doubt his identity. Had Miss Ward appeared during the life of her grandfather he would have known the truth himself. But having no possible cause of suspicion he didn't in any way doubt the claims of the man who pretended to be his grandson."

"I give up," and Tom Pinney threw out his hands before him. "I did pretend to be the

grandson of Mr. Winslow, I am an impostor, but I want it understood that I believed Miss Ward was dead. They told me so positively while I was at the hospital. I had clutched the bag of papers when the crash came, partly with an idea of saving it for Miss Ward,—for I knew how she cherished it,—and partly in an unconscious grip which made the bag stay in my hand as I was picked up and carried to the hospital. Then when the nurse assumed it was mine, I conceived the plan of impersonating the missing grandchild. Miss Ward had told me the whole story, I knew all the details, and learned corroboration from the papers in the bag. I had everything but the amethyst cross, and I bought an old one in New York and had it engraved on my way here. I confess it all, in hopes of being judged leniently, for as I say, I had every reason to believe Miss Ward was killed in the accident, and I felt I was injuring no one, and perhaps bringing cheer and comfort to a lonely old man——”

“Never mind about that sort of talk, Mr. Pinney,” Lane said, looking disgusted at the tone and expression of the hypocrite.

“But don’t be too hard on him,” said Lora Ward, amazed at the turn things had taken and truly sorry for Pinney. “He thought I was dead——”

"Well, he didn't think so, after you arrived here on the scene—" Barry began, and Pinney tried to defend himself.

"By that time," he argued, "I was so firmly established in this position——"

"That you couldn't bring yourself to vacate!" Lane said. "Well, never mind all that, Mr. Pinney,—if that is your real name! Here's what we're going to talk about now. What do you know of Maisie Merton?"

If ever a short speech produced a sensation, that one did. Pinney turned dead white, his jaw fell and his eyes seemed to bulge from their sockets.

"N—nothing!" he cried, "nothing at all——"

"Except that you killed her!" Lane said, and his low tones seemed to reverberate through the silence. "Miss Ward, there are going to be some very unpleasant revelations,—perhaps you and Mrs. Winslow would better leave the room——"

"No," said Lora, who was resting in Burr's protecting arm, "No, I'd rather know."

Molly, too, signified her firm intention of staying and Lane went on; "I have seen the Moving Picture called 'Primitive Passions' and I recognized yourself and the unfortunate woman who was killed on the porch of this house, some time ago. That woman played in that film with

you. In the picture you stabbed her to death,—stabbed her in the throat with a wicked, fiendish knife, that you often flourished in the films of Western stories you played in. In the picture the killing was only pretence, but—when she wrote to you, and threatened to interfere with your career with Mr. Winslow, you made an appointment for her to come here late at night, and you went downstairs, met her on the porch and killed her with that knife!”

The accused man tried to speak, he stammered denials but the words died in his throat as Lane went remorselessly on.

“And as the crowning act of your damnable life, you killed the man who had befriended you, who had taken you into his heart and home, had loved you and treated you as his own—you used the same knife—with diabolical cleverness, with fiendish cunning, you personated the old professor, and came here and killed the man who thought himself your grandfather.”

“Oh, no, no!” Lora moaned, “not that!”

“Yes, just that!” Lane averred. “The old professor was Tom Pinney disguised, not much, but enough for his purpose. He took that room at Mrs. Plum’s, he enacted the old professor, and then, he came here that day, rang the bell, was let in by Jenks and after his dreadful deed, he calmly went upstairs to his own room,

resumed the character of Joyce Gilray, and came down at the butler's call, to weep over the dead body of his own victim!"

"Wait, Mr. Lane, wait!" Pinney's voice rang out, "don't be too smart! Remember, please, that with his dying breath, Mark Winslow said 'Not Joyce! Tell Burr not Joyce!'"

"Yes," Lane glared at the speaker, "and what did the dying man mean by those words? *Not* that Joyce didn't kill him,—as we all took the meaning, but, that *you* were not *Joyce*! And Burr was to be told that you were not Joyce,—not the true Joyce. The dying man said, 'not my grandson, Joyce!' and it is plain now, that he meant he had discovered your fraud—and, this you know to be the truth, Tom Pinney!"

The man addressed, who sat, his head bowed on his hands, did not look up or uncover his face.

Lane gave a spring at him.

"As I feared!" he cried, "he has poisoned himself,—he's already dead—or dying. Take the women out of the room!"

It was over in a moment. Pinney had had a capsule of deadly poison in his pocket, had taken it unseen, and had died almost instantly.

The lawyers turned him over to the police, whom Lane had arranged to have stationed outside, though he had expected an arrest, not this fatality.

"Tell us how you found out all about it," Brett cried, and Lane said, "It all came from one tiny clue. That of the turned down leaves."

"In his books?" Barry asked.

"Yes. Gilray,—as he was known—had a habit of turning up leaves at the bottom of the page, I noticed in his room here, and when I saw the same trick in the 'professor's' books, I began to suspect the truth. Then I learned that the 'professor' though often uncultured in his ways, yet also frequently showed fastidious and conventional manners. I sort of surmised an actor and a villain both, and from that things unfolded rapidly. Then Jenks put me on the track of Maisie Merton. She was Pinney's wife,—they had often acted together. He thought he had eluded her but when she turned up and threatened his standing here in Willowvale he killed her to get rid of her. I learned all these things piecemeal and put them together, but they're all true. The man was not a villain until he took up this path of deceit. Then, circumstances arose one after the other, and he gave way to the worst temptations. He had had two letters from Miss Ward,—addressed of course to Mark Winslow. Her advent threatened his position anew, and he planned to kill Mr. Winslow and cash in his inheritance and get away. But Miss Ward arrived before his

departure, and then he had to face the music. He put up a big fight but the odds were against him."

"The odds being Lorimer Lane," Barry declared and Brett heartily agreed.

"I ought to have seen through it all sooner," the detective said, with a ruminative face. "But I found it hard to imagine such a despicable criminal and such a fearful double crime! However, Miss Ward will have no trouble in proving her inheritance now, though I doubt if she cares to assume the name of Joyce Gilray, after that scoundrel has defamed it."

"It won't be necessary," Lora said, passing the door as these words were spoken, "I shall retain the name of Lora Ward, which my mother gave me——"

"Until," Burr said, coming to her side, "until you change it for Mrs. Burr Winslow."

THE END.

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